La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América

The máquina real *and the puppet theater repertoire in Europe and America*

La máquina real *et le répertoire de théâtre de marionnettes en Europe et en América*

Francisco J. Cornejo (dir.)

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ÍNDICE

Interpreting, illustrating, adapting and creating – five centuries of puppet repertoires in Britain

Interpretando, ilustrando, adaptando y creando — Cinco siglos de repertorios de títeres británicos

Interpréter, d'illustrer, d'adapter et de créer — Cinq siècles de répertoires de marionnettes britanniques

John Mc Cormick
Fellow Emeritus (Drama), Trinity College Dublin

Resumen: El repertorio de principios del siglo XVII estaba basado en la improvisación sobre la Biblia, los temas populares y las historias familiares; a la vez que los titiriteros comenzaron a hacer sus propias adaptaciones del repertorio del teatro vivo. Después de la década de 1660 Pulcinella (Punch) fue la figura cómica principal, y hacia 1700 las máscaras de la *Commedia dell'arte*, tanto con actores como con marionetas, influyeron en la pantomima inglesa, que en el siglo XIX se convirtió en un género separado con el nuevo personaje del Clown, desarrollado por Joey Grimaldi. Después de Grimaldi los elementos de la *Commedia* fueron llevados al extremo como farsa arlequinada y en gran parte improvisada, que enfatizaba lo físico más que lo verbal, y cada compañía de marionetas tenía un juego independiente de personajes de la *Commedia*. A finales del siglo XIX, el material más estrictamente dramático dio paso a lo visual, y la idea de la marioneta como actor en miniatura retrocedió. En el siglo XX el repertorio de títeres le dio todo su valor al títere como tal, y la interpretación de un texto escrito dejó de ser la preocupación principal. La "escritura escénica" se convirtió en la norma y la mayoría de las piezas fueron puestas en escena sólo por la compañía para la que fueron concebidas.

Palabras clave: Teatro de títeres inglés. Repertorio. Punchinella. Punch. Siglo XVII al XX.

Abstract: Improvisation on the Bible, folk material and familiar stories provided the repertoire in the early 17th century and showmen began to make their own adaptations from the repertoire of the live stage. After the 1660s Pulcinella (Punch) was the central comic figure, and by 1700 the masks of the Commedia dell'arte, with both actors and marionettes, led to the English pantomime which in the nineteenth century became a separate genre with the new character of Clown, developed by Joey Grimaldi. After Grimaldi the Commedia elements were moved to the end for a farcical and largely improvised harlequinade which emphasised the physical rather than the verbal, and every marionette company had a separate set of Commedia characters. By the late nineteenth century more strictly dramatic material gave place to the visual and the idea of the marionette as a miniature actor receded. In the twentieth century the puppet repertoire gave full value to the puppet as a puppet and interpretation of a written text ceased to be a main concern. "Scenic writing" became the norm and most pieces were performed only by the company for which they were created.

Key words: English Puppet Theatre. Repertoire. Punchinello. Punch. 17th to 20th century.

Résumé: Le répertoire du début du XVIIe siècle comprenait des thèmes tirés de la Bible, de thèmes populaires et de contes bien connus, et en même temps les montreurs de marionnettes commencèrent à faire leurs propres adaptations du répertoire des comédiens. A partir des années 1660 Pulcinella (Punch) était le protagoniste comique et vers 1700 les masques de la Commedia dell'arte, chez les comédiens et chez les marionnettes, aboutissaient à la pantomime anglaise qui, au cours du dix-neuvième siècle s'est transformée en un nouveau genre avec le personnage du Clown interprété par Joey Grimaldi. Après Grimaldi

les éléments de la Commedia dell'arte, repoussés à la fin du spectacle, devinrent l'arlequinade, une farce improvisée pour la plupart mettant l'accent plus sur l'aspect physique que sur le dialogue, et chaque compagnie de marionnettes possédait son propre jeu de personnages pour l'arlequinade. Vers la fin du XIXe le répertoire théâtral faisait place à un spectacle plus visuel et l'idée de la marionnette comme un comédien de taille réduite reculait. Au XXe siècle le répertoire du théâtre de la marionnette reconnaissait la spécificité de la figure animée qui ne devait plus être simplement l'interprète d'un texte écrit. « L'écriture scéniques » devint la norme et la presque totalité des spectacles étaient joués uniquement par la compagnie pour laquelle ils avaient été créés.

Mots clés: Théâtre anglais de marionnettes. Répertoire. Pulcinella. Punch. Siècles XVII au XX.

T he best list of repertoires of English puppet companies since the 17th century is in George Speaight's *History of the English Puppet Theatre*[1]. From advertisements and sometimes more literary references Speaight managed to find the titles of a vast number of pieces performed by puppets, but very little survives of the performance scripts. Before the twentieth century remarkably few pieces were written specifically for the marionette stage and of those most were written for performance under special circumstances and never became part of a more general repertoire.

Most showmen made their own adaptations but may never have worked directly from a script. It was common to use a familiar title as a form of publicity. Since showmen had considerable improvisatory skills it can be difficult to know how closely any performance reflected an original printed text.

Many of the titles of pieces performed by puppets in the early years of the seventeenth century come to us via references in stage plays of the period. In late Elizabethan times marionette shows were referred to as "motions" and may have been comparable with the Spanish "retablo". Henry Morley in his *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair*[2] mentions the "memory of the old Miracle Plays and Moralities being cherished among the puppets" circa 1650. From the surviving titles there is little indication of such pieces, but that does not mean that they did not exist. As England had become a protestant country, the favourite subjects, with the exception of the story of the *Prodigal Son*, were taken from the Old Testament: *Sodom and Gomorrah*, *Jonah*, *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* were all popular and remained so until the mid-eighteenth century. By far and away the most frequently performed subject was the *Creation of the World*. One of the best descriptions of this is to be found in the publicity for the puppeteer Crawley in the early 1700s. His show could be seen at Bartholomew Fair and included an impressive presentation of the Flood:

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[1] George SPEAIGHT, *History of the English Puppet Theatre*, London, George G. Harrap, 1955. 2nd edition, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.

[2] Henry MORLEY, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1880.

The last scene does present Noah and his Family coming out of the Ark, with all the Beasts, two by two, and all the Fowls of the Air seen in a Prospect sitting upon the Trees. Likewise over the Ark is seen the Sun rising in a most glorious manner, moreover a multitude of Angels will be seen in double rank, which presents a double prospect, one for the Sun, the other for a Palace, where will be seen six Angels ringing six Bells. Likewise Machines descend from above, double and treble with Dives rising out of Hell, and Lazarus in Abraham's Bosom besides several Figures dancing Jiggs, Sarabands and Country Dances to the admiration of the spectators; with the merry conceits of squire Punch and Sir John Spendall.[3]

Hogarth's celebrated picture of Southwark Fair in 1730 also shows a booth where *The Creation of the World* is being performed.
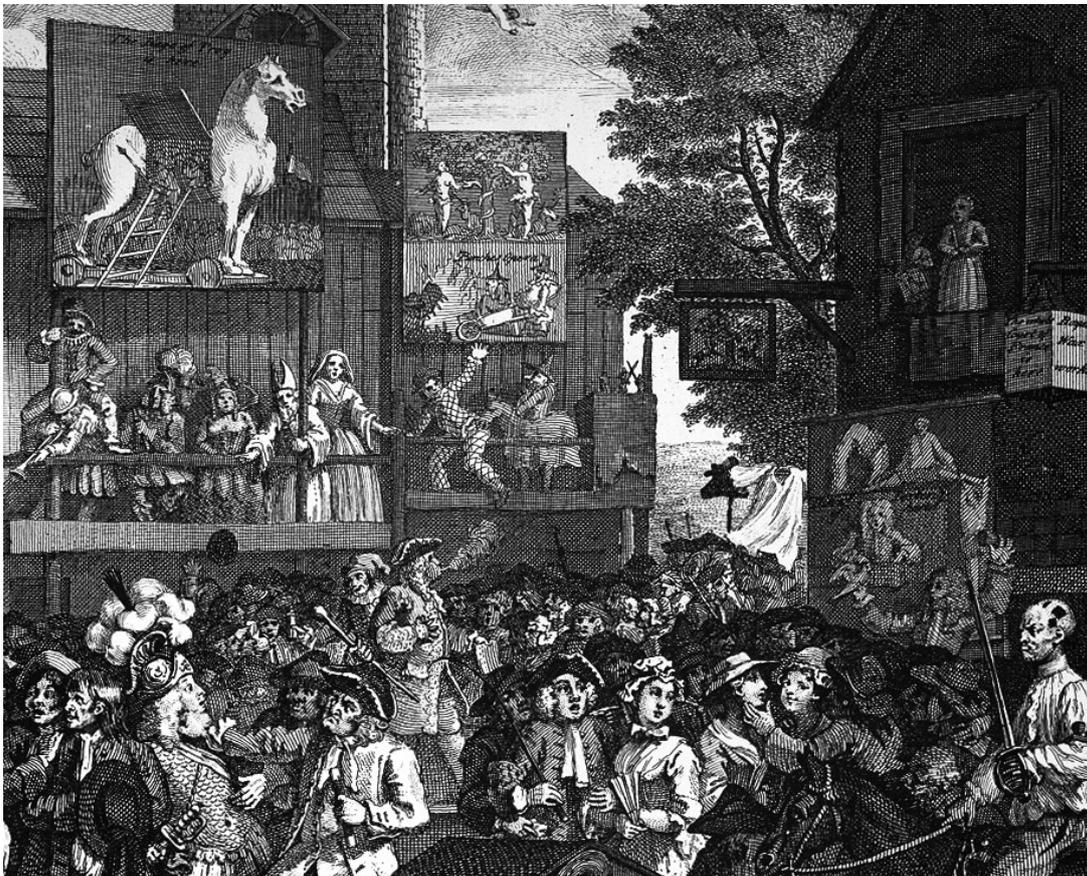
Southwark Fair *(detail), engraving by William Hogarth, originally called the* Humours of the Fair. *The engraving was based on a 1733 painting of the 1732 Southwark Fair (now Cincinnati Art Museum).*

As elsewhere in Europe folk tales formed a significant part of the repertoire — some belonged to the general European tradition: *Valentine and Orson*, *Patient Grizel*, *Faustus*, *The Witch of Endor*.

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[3] Quoted from Harleian MSS., no. 5931, no. 274, in Joseph STRUTT, *The sports and pasetimes of the people of England…* [1801], London, Methuen & Co., 1903, pp. 145—146. Also quoted by Sybil ROSENFELD, *The Theatre of the London Fairs in the 18th Century*, Cambridge, University Press, 1960, pp. 160—161.

Pepys' Diary, 30 Aug., 1667, for example, mentions a puppet play of *Patient Grizel*. There were also more native tales and traditions such as *Robin Hood* or *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. (Friar Bacon, twelfth century scholar was the subject of Robert Greene's play with the same title (1594). He is presented as a white magician (the opposite of Faust) and has invented a brass head which will speak at a certain time, but leaves his man Miles in charge of it and Miles (the comic character) falls asleep – the head starts to speak: "Time is", "Time was", and "Time is past" – and then shatters.

The puppet version of this tale was almost certainly derived from chapbook material, as were pieces on Robin Hood and many other pieces. Chapbooks were sold in the streets by pedlars in the eighteenth century and were a significant form of popular literature. Most of this had faded from the repertoire by the end of the eighteenth century, but one very popular story was *The Children in the Wood* (later *The Babes in the Wood*) which persisted right up until the twentieth century, although it would gradually change into a new format and be presented as a pantomime. This concerns two orphans entrusted to an uncle who arranges their murder in the forest where their bodies are covered in leaves by the birds.

Illustration – chapbook – The Children in the Wood.

Before the development of the Punch and Judy show in the late eighteenth century we know little about the repertoire of the glove puppet stage, but everything suggests that performances consisted of short improvised farces and fights between pairs of characters. The earliest of these is illustrated on the fourteenth—century manuscript of the *Roman d'Alexandre* and we also see a fight between two glove puppets on the parade space of the booth in Hogarth's painting.

George Speaight argued that the puppet show in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) was a glove—puppet show.[4] I am on the other hand convinced that this is the best possible depiction we can have of a marionette show of the period. In Jonson's play all the characters, including a Puritan furiously hostile to theatre, go to the Fair and watch a puppet show. The show itself is a pastiche of the type of shows that could be seen at the time. It includes a text performed by puppets and gives us an insight into what might be happening on the real puppet stage. The characters pay 2d. to go into a booth or tent to see the show — and putting the performance inside a paying space is in itself probably an indication of a marionette show, rather than a glove—puppet one which would have occurred in the street. It is described as "an excellent motion", a term which also suggests a marionette show. The showman, Lantern Leatherhead, describes himself as "the mouth of 'em all", an indication that he speaks for the puppets, in front of the stage, whilst someone else operates the figures. William Powell and Randolph Stretch in the eighteenth century were showmen who did not operate their puppets either, and in 20th century Catania the "puparo" continued to provide voices without operating the puppets. The main focus of this piece is the story of *Hero and Leander* based on Christopher Marlowe's unfinished poem (begun in 1592 when theatres closed because of outbreak of plague). This must be one of the earliest examples of the way in which marionettes could be used for parody of more elevated literature or theatre. Jonson's action is set in London not in the Greek world described by Ovid, or even Marlowe. Leander is a dyer's son and Hero a "wench o' the Bankside" (a girl living across the river Thames). "Cole", the sculler, ferries people across the Thames, and Jonas, as Cupid, is a drawer (barman) and gives Hero a pint of sherry to get her in the right mood for Leander's first visit. The classical friends, Damon and Pythias appear as a couple of pimps who share a whore. A further character is the ghost of Dionysius the ruler of Siracusa, (reduced to the role of a schoolmaster), who ticks off Damon and Pythias for fighting. When a fight erupts there are six characters on the stage at once, which would suggest three operators (another indication that this is almost certainly not a glove-puppet show). The script is improvised to a scenario and Leatherhead when asked does he play according to the printed book makes clear that he does not.

When the puritan *Busy of the land Zeal* gets into an argument with Dionysius, it is first because he sees him as an idol, and therefore heathen, and he attacks the puppet as being part of a profane profession. When he has to be more specific he calls the puppet an abomination because of women wearing male clothing and vice-versa — at which point the puppet lifts its garment to show that it has no genitalia of either sex.

Ben Jonson's play is, of course, a one-off. Since the sixteenth century authors in Britain have written plays to be performed by live actors but very few have written plays specifically for the puppet stage. With puppets, and more specifically marionettes, adaptation was the name of the game until the early twentieth century.

Pulcinella, as Punchinello or Punch, probably arrived in England in the 1660s and adapted fully to the English marionette stage, where he remained as the main comic figure throughout the century. A famous satirical sketch of Powell's show depicts him with his wife Joan on the stage,

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[4] SPEAIGHT, op. cit., p. 65.

and he is seen again in William Hogarth's painting of Southwark fair, where he is shown pushing his wife, Joan, in a wheelbarrow in the direction of a rather medieval mouth of hell.

Like Pulcinella in Italy and Polichinelle in France, Punchinello, shortened to Punch and generally accompanied by Joan was a central figure and used to draw the most serious pieces in the direction of comedy. Sometimes he slipped into a role such as Falstaff in an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, or into that of the comic servant Miles in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.*

In other cases Punchinello could transform a serious piece into a parody. Rather like the operatic parodies of the marionette theatres of the Foire St Germain and the Foire St Laurent in Paris, there were marionette theatres in London where parodies of opera, which was a craze at the time, were shown to audiences of more fashionable people. In *The False Triumph* Punchinello took over the role of Jupiter and descended in a cloud machine, thus making a burlesque of an opera, whilst in another piece, with the squeaky voice produced by his swazzle, he was immediately perceived as a satirical comment on the popularity of castrato singers.

The famous eighteenth-century showman Flockton, who regularly performed at Batholomew Fair, had a show frequently referred to as Punch's Puppet Show, which is depicted in a little series of prints, probably produced in 1772. One shows Punch pushing his wife in a wheelbarrow into the middle of a scene with a king and Queen on thrones; in another he is dancing with his wife and eventually the pair of them are seen being carried off by a flying devil.[5]

A surviving Flockton programme from around 1780 indicated his "Italian Fantoccini" performing a well-known repertoire piece, *The Rival Queens; or, The Death of Alexander the Great*.[6] This was followed by Flockton displaying "dexterity of hand" — in other words performing conjuring tricks, a common part of a mixed bill with puppets. Next came two vocalists and the programme concluded with what was described as "Breaking Machinery", almost certainly a pantomime or afterpiece of the type popular throughout the eighteenth century and almost certainly involving characters of the Commedia dell'Arte and machinery or trick effects. The title of this last item of the programme was *Merlin; or, The British Enchanter*.[7]

In Britain the theatre licensing act was introduced in 1737 in an attempt to muzzle criticism of Walpole's government in the satires of Henry Fielding. This limited the number of theatres that could present dramatic material and puppets were sometimes a way around such limitations, as they were in the fairground theatres in Paris. The licensing act sometimes reduced the choice of dramatic material for the marionette stage since, technically, a marionette company could not perform plays from the repertoire of what was known as the legitimate stage. In practice, marionette productions were such free adaptations that little were usually done. However, in 1820 the showman Middleton was arrested in Kent on the order of the manager of the local Theatre Royal who saw the offering of a dramatic work as encroaching on his monopoly. In the live theatre one way round the licensing act was the burlesque, which could be loosely defined as

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[5] SPEAIGHT, op. cit., p. 167, reproduces a view of the outside of Flockton's booth and one of Punch with his wife in a wheelbarrow. The original print was in George Speaight's collection and is now in the Victoria and Albert theatre collection.

[6] This very popular blank verse tragedy by Nathaniel Lee was first staged in 1677.

[7] This bill appeared on an auction catalogue in 2016. Its current location is unknown.

a work with at least five songs (rather like the French "vaudeville") and was generally performed in the minor houses and therefore did not count as 'legitimate' theatre.

In the eighteenth century many burlesques were written to be performed by live actors and these transferred easily to the puppet stage. One of the more curious pieces is Fielding's *Tragedy of tragedies or the life and death of Tom Thumb the great* (1730) which satirises the vogue for heroic tragedy with easily recognisable allusions to a vast number of plays of the time. Its diminutive hero is treated with the seriousness due to heroic tragedy. His diminished size and the treatment of heroic themes made this an ideal piece for puppets and in 1780 it was adapted for the puppet stage by the Irish writer Kane O'Hara. Fielding may not have been writing his play with the puppet stage in mind, but, apart from being very successful it proved to be an ideal piece for puppets and was taken up by more than one company.

An immensely popular form in the eighteenth century was the ballad opera, a comic parallel to the Italian opera with a subject generally relating to low life and songs set to well-known popular tunes. The craze for ballad opera was set by John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* of 1728 and the genre became very popular on the marionette stage. In 1738 Charlotte Charke, daughter of the actor Colley Cibber, opened a short-lived theatre in the Haymarket, London, and offerings included Fielding's *Mock Doctor*, a ballad opera based on Moliere's *Médécin Malgre lui*, with Punchinello in the main role, and the *Beggar's Wedding* inspired by the Beggar's Opera.

With the eighteenth century the English pantomime brought the characters of the Commedia dell'Arte to the British stage and this became a very popular afterpiece which was adapted rapidly to the marionette one. Harlequin was generally the central figure and these pieces are often called harlequinades. These were fast moving pieces and emphasised lazzi and tricks, including elaborate scenic effects and transformations. Plays with Harlequin in the title were common and most related to productions that had already been created on the actors' stage, such as *Harlequin Mercury*, *The Birth of Harlequin*, *Hecate, or Harlequin from the Moon*.

At the turn of the nineteenth century the actor Joey Grimaldi took over the character of Clown, originally the simpleton of the melodrama, gave him a special costume and make—up, and turned him into a trickster. Clown replaced Punch, and Harlequin gradually lost his importance becoming little more than a dancing partner for Columbine.

After Grimaldi retired the harlequinade, which had gradually taken the lion's share of the pantomime, was greatly reduced and became simply an appendage which occurred once the main action had been wound up.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marionettes were thought of as miniature actors and in some cases, as with the Scots showman Billy Purvis in the early nineteenth century, simply replaced the live ones which he was unable to pay. An important aspect of the travelling marionette shows of the time was that they provided cheap theatrical entertainment in much the same way as other strolling players and brought this to audiences which were often in more rural districts. They were one of the main attractions of the various fairs around the country and reached audiences that might never normally visit a theatre.

The melodrama came into being at the end of the eighteenth century and became a genre much enjoyed by audiences for marionette shows. Little attention was given to psychology and the

emphasis was more on instantly recognisable characters in exciting, difficult or dangerous situations. This was ideally suited to the marionette stage and with the printing of cheap texts by publishers such as Lacy's or Dick's which could be bought for a matter of pence, playscripts became easily available to showmen and an adaptation usually meant simply reading through the script, shortening long speeches, simplifying the action and reducing the number of characters to what a usually small company of 2 to 4 people could manage. There was also a tendency to give an extra role to the comic figure of the company, to which the showman usually lent his voice. This figure could break frame, address the audience and comment on the piece or on more local and topical events or people. Even the most tear—jerking melodrama could be tilted towards comedy.
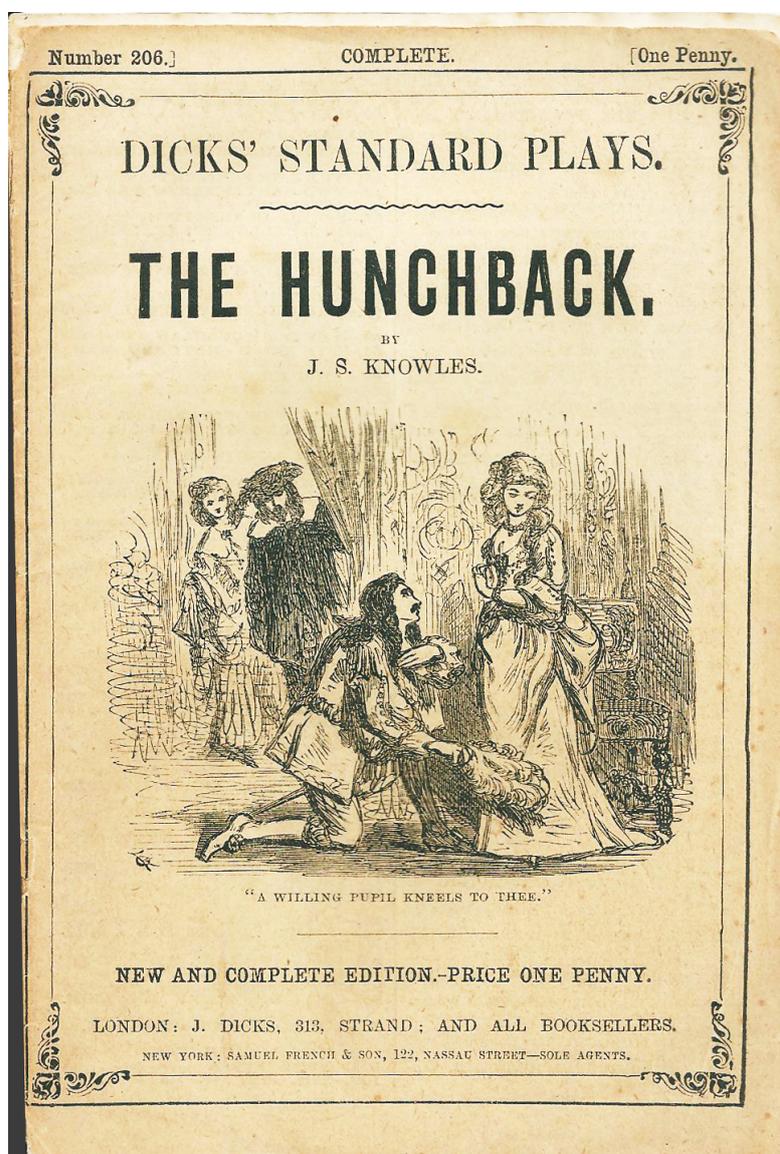
Dick's standard plays.

Apart from stage plays and plots of popular novels, another source of material was the popular press where accounts of sensational crimes or court cases might be found. *Maria Martin, or Murder in the Red Barn* was a story that gripped audiences in the minor theatres, found its way into the repertoires of strolling players, and also became popular on the marionette stage. The events occurred in the 1820s and concerned a country girl, Maria Martin, who had been seduced by a local land-owner, had a child by him (which he murdered), and was subsequently killed by him as he had no intention of marrying her. The crime came out when her mother had a dream which was followed by an investigation.

By the nineteenth century a full programme could consist of a melodrama, a short farce and a selection of special trick numbers or fantoccini. Increasingly the melodrama was replaced by the pantomime, and by the 1870s every major company had a pantomime in its repertoire. Like the melodrama, nineteenth century pantomimes depended on the binary opposition of good and evil, usually personified by the demon king and the good fairy. This often meant a hell scene or equivalent at the very start, such as is found in much folk puppetry in Europe ranging from *Faust* to the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Holden pantomimes often began with a Hell scene, mainly an excuse for lots of devils dancing around, but they sometimes replaced this with an undersea scene with many strange creatures (probably borrowed for the Victorian spectacular theatre, and more specifically from Dion Boucicault's *Babil and Bijou*, (Covent Garden, 1872.)

By now the pantomime that had evolved in the early eighteenth century and consisted of a dramatic subject interspersed with scenes with Commedia dell arte characters had become a rather different sort of entertainment. By the first decades of the nineteenth century it had become a spectacular extravaganza based on a fairy-tale or folk tale and was an excuse for splendid costumes, scenery and music. The Commedia characters gradually receded to the end of the show, lost any relation they might have had with the main plot, and the harlequinade became a separate component of the evening's entertainment. On the live stage a pantomime story ended with the fairy queen waving her wand and transforming the main figures of the story into the characters for the harlequinade (often achieved by the removal of masks and outer clothing to reveal the Commedia characters underneath). On the marionette stage it was simpler to have a second set of harlequinade characters who would replace the main figures at the appropriate moment, and every company had such a set.

By the 1860s, the main figures of the marionette harlequinade were Pantaloon and the Clown. The comic business was carried on mainly by these two, but after the creation of the police force in 1829, the policeman joined the crew of the harlequinade and became an inevitable victim of their jokes. On the marionette stage, the marionette policeman was often a trick figure who, when dragged by Clown on one side and Pantaloon on the other would split in half. By the1860s and 1870s the harlequinade had lost any real plot line and become a series of comic sketches, probably entirely with improvised dialogue, centring on Pantaloon and Clown who created chaos whether in the street, in a restaurant, or in the famous Crystal Palace of the Great Exhibition of 1861.

A rare surviving pantomime text is that for *Little Red Riding Hood* as performed by the Royal Marionettes of William Bullock. This may be because the text was printed and sold as a form of

merchandising. Bullock had started life as a schoolmaster, not a showman, which may explain his ability to write a complete script in which the verbal element could be extremely entertaining.

Bullock's *Little Red Riding Hood* has an opening scene in the cave of the gnomes (now become "the Board of Brokers where speculators come") and their king Hobblegobblewitz has in his debt the duke (wicked baron) Ravensbourg who must now pay with his life or find a substitute (Little Red Riding Hood), and Hobblegobblewitz provides him with a wolf skin, thus making him into a werewolf. The darkness of scene one is then contrasted with a bright scene in the "Fairy Dell" with fairies singing and dancing and the hero, prince Hyacinth (disguised as a shepherd) and a reference to the pygmies (the fairy army). In scene three, grandmother's cottage in the wood, part of the folktale is picked up with the characters of the mother, Monica, and Dorothy the grandmother. Hyacinth arrives to protect Red Riding Hood and locks her in a room while the duke and his sidekick, Poggidorf, arrive. Hyacinth too is in danger, but Amaryllis, the fairy queen, immobilises the two villains while Hyacinth and Red Riding Hood escape. A scene in the Forest in winter introduces the pigmy army, and then Ravensbourg, as the wolf, encounters Red Riding Hood. The last scene is back in the cottage and the folk tale is wound up quickly as Dorothy receives a message that her daughter is sick and goes to attend her, the wolf slips in and dresses as granny, and just as Red Riding Hood is in danger the wolf is shot by the pygmy army. It is then time for the characters to be transformed for the harlequinade (Hyacinth as Harlequin, Red Riding Hood as Colombine, Hobblegobblewitz as Pantaloon and Ravensbourg as Clown). The most interesting feature of the final big scene of the story is the introduction of the character of a very loquacious jackdaw which, effectively, has the role of the comic, otherwise missing from the plot, and which seems to have delighted audiences from the start

Everything concludes when the Grand Transformation scene "with large cataract of real water, takes place, which is always well worth waiting for the Four minutes delay in setting to witness".

Although no scripts survive we also know quite a lot about the pantomimes performed by the Holden companies. Publicity gives a fairly good idea of the basic plot. A publication produced by Thomas Holden on tour, *Thomas Holden et ses fantoches* (1879), also provides a more detailed account of the popular pantomime of *Beauty and the Beast*. The familiar fairy story is heavily truncated in that Beauty has little more to do than agree to go to the Beast's castle and after a brief scene with the Beast (preceded by a comic one between her admirer Jack and the Beast) the Fairy arrives for the transformation of the characters into those for the Harlequinade — Beauty and the Beast as Colombine and Halrlequin respectively, and Jack and Pump (the father) into Clown and Pantaloon.

John Holden's *Bluebeard* was heavily based on the musical piece taken by Michael Kelly and George Colman from Grétry's opera and the eponymous main figure was changed from a Frenchman to a Turk. This too was heavily cut and without a script it is difficult to know how much dialogue was actually retained. It also had a strong comic element when first presented in Britain, where Bluebeard was provided with 20 wives and babies. This element may have disappeared later when Holden travelled abroad and seems to have left only the more sinister and exciting element until the characters are transformed into those of the harlequinade. It is not indicated, but one may suppose that Selim (Fatima's real love) became Harlequin while she became Columbine. Presumable the father, Ibrahim, turned into Pantaloon and Bluebeard became Clown.

If the productions of Thomas Holden are anything to go by, the fairy tale part of the pantomime became more and more incoherent until it was little more than a string of beautifully set scenes that had proved successful and provided an opportunity for such things as ballet interludes (to show the skill of the Holdens as manipulators).

Smaller companies traveling through England, such as the Tillers, were more likely to continue with the dramas, but companies that travelled widely abroad reached a stage where the fairy tale was virtually emptied of dramatic content — and certainly required no script, whilst the Harlequinade consisted of a series of comic sketches where any dialogue would have been improvised. The show usually ended with a Grand Transformation scene, also taken from the mid-century actors' theatre. This could consist of up to 10 or a dozen changes of scene, lasting a number of minutes and concluding with a grand effect of light and water. Most companies had just one such scene and used it repeatedly as a grand finale to the entertainment.

When we speak of the 'repertoire' of the marionette theatre, we should remember that that also includes elements of a non-dramatic nature, from the Grand Transformation to the various trick and variety acts which by the late 18th century became known as fantoccini. By the early twentieth century these were often the only programme presented by companies in Britain.

Companies of Northern Italy had collections of hand-written scripts in large format designed for reading during a performance, but there is little indication of these in Britain. British puppeteers like many others claimed to carry a repertoire of plays in their heads. There are no signs of scripts designed to be read during performance, but we do have a collection of Dicks' plays used by the Tiller company which indicate sometimes how the parts were spread amongst a small group of performers, and they also contain numerous cuts and occasionally small pieces of additional dialogue. There are a few examples of individual parts carefully written out, a practice that also belongs to the actors' theatre. I have in my possession a partial copy of a relatively late script (possibly twentieth century) for the classic piece *The Babes in the Wood.* This covers the first two acts. It begins with a dying speech by the mother, but the rest consists entirely of lines spoken by the wicked uncle who plans the murder of the children. Possibly the same actor played both roles, but whatever the case this is not a script that could be read during a performance. I have also spoken to travelling fit-up actors active until the1960s and one informed me that when there was a new play she would read the script after an evening performing another play, rehearse it the next day, and perform it the day after. (Quite different from some modern companies who rehearse a production over several months!) Another actor described how the leader of the troupe would bring them to Dublin to see the latest Holywood film, in one case *The 10 Commandments*, and a few days later, totally improvised, the troupe would perform this in an Irish provincial town. We should not therefore underestimate the capacity of travelling marionette companies to rehearse and learn a script in a very short space of time, or even to improvise a show without any direct reference to a written script

Before the twentieth century the amount of original work written for the puppet stage is extremely small and much of this has been written about by Speaight and also Henryk Jurkowski[8].

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[8] Henryk JURKOWSKI, *Ecrivains et marionnettes– quatre siècles de littérature dramatique,* Charleville-Mézières, Institut International de la Marionnette, 1991.

In most cases it was produced by people who were not in the first instance presenters of puppet shows but found themselves in circumstances where the use of puppets rather than live actors was a way around restrictions, or else where they were providing entertainment for a more limited social circle.

The vast bulk of dramatic writing designed directly for the puppet stage belongs to the modern period when the idea of using a puppet to present material that actors normally present is seen as pointless and where there is a real appreciation of what belongs specifically to the puppet stage.

There are probably very few authors who set out to write puppet plays — with the exception of those who provide so-called scripts generally intended to help school children working on a puppet project. In some cases puppet companies have turned to specific authors for a play, a recent case being Moving Stage Marionettes whose theatre is a barge moored on the Regent's Park canal in London. They turned to the well-established dramatist Howard Barker who wrote *All he fears* for them in 1993. For Barker, whose work is of a poetic rather than a naturalistic nature this was an opportunity to extend his range since it gave him a degree of freedom that the physical constraints of the living actor cannot allow — his comment in an interview in *Puck* 8 was that what the puppet allowed was the precision of movement and the purity of expression which was provide by the absence of the human element — a view remarkably similar to that of Gordon Craig in "The Actor and the Übermarionette".[9]

Bernard Shaw's last play, *Shakes versus Shav*, was written at the request of Waldo Lanchester in 1949.[10] Lanchester was at the forefront of the revival of marionette theatre in England in the late 1920s, just as the older companies were dying out. *Shakes versus Shav* is an occasional piece, rather in the style of some eighteenth-century parodies, but it would be hard to argue that this is representative of the mainstream repertoire of the marionette theatre.

In Britain, where companies are small it is not common for a writer to bring a play to a company unless it has been specially commissioned, and in that case it is usually a collaborative process. In most cases puppet companies or solo performers create their own material and the production of a script is part of that, but dialogue is not necessarily the most important element. The average modern puppeteer also has to make the puppets, perform with them, look after the business side of the show, and many other things which would have been unheard of in the great ensembles of Eastern Europe during the socialist period. Writing for the puppet stage is what Bertolt Brecht would have called "scenic writing". On the modern puppet stage the full language of the theatre is brought into play and the verbal element is often minimal.

Comparatively few companies today perform pieces that have been created by other companies. Stephen Mottram's *Seed Carriers* was a collaborative piece in which the puppeteer worked with a musician, not a script-writer and it is difficult to imagine a piece of the nature being staged by any

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[9] Published in Edward Gordon CRAIG, *On the art of the theatre*, London, William Heinemann, 1911, and subsequently in more recent editions.

[10] LANCHESTER published this text. There is a copy at the University of California and the text can be accessed online in *Full text of "THE SHORTER PLAYS"* - Internet Archive https://archive.org/stream/.../shorterplays007012mbp_djvu.txt

other company. This is also an illustration of the centrality of the modern puppeteer as a creative artist rather than an interpreter of existing works. Consequently, with very few exceptions a script is associated only with the company that created it.

When a puppeteer adapts an existing literary text for the puppet stage there is no question of imitating the actors' theatre —— it is a matter of creating a piece directly for a medium that is an acknowledged theatrical form in its own right.