Dramatic Figures in the Venetian Republic: Performance, Patronage, and Puppets

by

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Abstract

This study offers new insights to the knowledge of Venice’s history and theatre historiography. It is the outcome of an interdisciplinary research investigating the visual and performative culture of this unique context though its representations with dramatic figures from the beginning to the end of its history as a republic.

The first chapter offers an insight into Medieval Venice focusing on liturgical drama, mystery plays, and civic ritual with display of movable sculptures and puppets. The second chapter sheds light on the relation between puppetry, the commedia, and different forms of spectacle with mechanised or indirectly controlled figures. Presented in the third chapter are the theatrical festivals with wondrous figures that were staged in the outskirts of Padua by two illustrious patrons of the arts, the Paduan Pio Enea II degli Obizzi and the Venetian Marco Contarini. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the debut of puppet opera, and the performances of this genre that were staged in the private and public theatres of Venice during the seventeenth century. The history of puppet opera in Venice continues in the fifth chapter, also making comparisons with performances held in cultural areas that absorbed the Venetian legacy. Critical analysis of the repertory of puppet theatre broadly defined and reflection on the aesthetics and operating techniques of the figures that were used has been made relating texts to specific objects, many of which are unpublished or little known. Shedding light on the Venetian eighteenth-century marionette theatres that are extant, attention has also been drawn of the role that these objects played in the history of collecting. In the sixth chapter the chronological account is suspended for a moment to leave room for some reflection on the intertwining between Venice and the Orient based on research findings. Cross-cultural analysis has been made comparing Venice’s puppet theatre traditions not only with those of the near East, but also with China based on material evidence. The seventh and last chapter investigates the relation between puppet theatre and the rising passion for views of the world as a stage, or animated microcosm to capture through observation.

There is inevitably much overlap across all these aspects, and yet attempts have been made to keep them separate in the discussion, either relating them to the time-related phenomenon within which they assume greater significance. Following a chronological thread, critical analysis of the puppet theatre manifestations originating in Venice has been carried out placing this genre within the frameworks of other arts, drawing comparisons with other traditions, and bringing to the fore reminiscences from the past at different times in history. All this making every possible effort not to turn the memory of an entertaining art form into the sterile analysis of its ‘faint reflection’.
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Introduction

A distinctive feature of puppet theatre of all cultures is that it links tangible and intangible heritage in a single conservatory framework. In this perspective, two-dimensional and three-dimensional figures with dramatic function can be seen as a link between the visual arts and the performing arts as conceptually synthesised in Fig. 1. What is most interesting about these figures is the way in which they exhibit the craftsmanship and staging practices of the contexts in which they originated, and reflect the cultural values of the historical moments to which they belonged. For their evocative power, adding to aesthetic qualities and material preciousness, some of these figures became collectibles while they were still used as performing objects. And when they ceased being ‘tools’ to employ in the staging of the shows for which they had been created, they maintained their ability to stir imagination bringing the invisible into the visible as objects of memory. Their study requires an interdisciplinary approach because, as Pietro C. Ferrigni remarked in his *Storia dei burattini*, ‘it is impossible to separate the history of puppets from the history of theatre, in the same way as it is impossible to separate the history of theatre from the history of humanity’.1 Nonetheless, grasping the essence of puppet theatre requires investigating its diversity of practices and traditions, which are inextricably linked to the cultural area in which they originated and developed, although often as a result of cross-fertilisation.

Over the last three years I have researched different kinds of performances with figures that were staged in the Venetian Republic at different times in history. This dissertation is aimed at shedding light on the artistic and cultural heritage of Venice and, not least, bringing a contribution to the historiography of puppet theatre.

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1 P. C. Ferrigni, *La storia dei burattini* (Fieramosca: Florence, 1884), 11.
Before explaining the rationale for this study and providing an overview of the sources examined, I would first clarify the notion of puppet theatre as an art form that I have adopted, and the nature of the dramatic figures that I have considered as relevant to it.

**Definitions and Taxonomy**

Charles Magnin was the first historian to argue that puppet theatre is an art form, which he saw as 'a kind of theatrical microcosm, in which the whole history of theatre is concentrated and reflected in miniature'.\(^2\) Other historians, including Ferrigni, Maurice Sand, Maria Signorelli, George Speaight, and Henryk Jurkowski, agreed with Magnin, whose view I also share. Following Magnin’s footpath these scholars contributed to shaping a knowledge of puppet theatre as a genre, which offers infinite possibilities of art forms. According to Steve Tillis, the uniqueness of puppet theatre lies in its ‘opalescence effect’, or the paradox that puppets are perceived like live beings, but rationally interpreted as objects at the same time.\(^3\) As a result the viewer shifts from engagement to estrangement from a spectacle that blends the real and the unreal creating an atmosphere in which hilariousness and awe coexist.

The puppet is a two-dimensional or three-dimensional simulacrum of a live being – a human, an animal, or a fantastic creature. Within the framework of this paper the wording puppet theatre refers to a genre of performance art in which one or more figures play a role as characters in a dramatic action that takes place before an audience. To be perceived as ‘animated’, a puppet must have a physical dimension and be able to ‘act’ and/or ‘speak’ through motion and/or vocal power provided by human effort.

Jurkowski pointed to this in his comprehensive definition of puppet theatre as an art in which ‘the speaking and performing object makes temporal use of physical sources for

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its vocal and driving powers, which are present beyond the object’. The complexity of this relationship determines the multifaceted nature of puppet theatre.

The technique of construction and manipulation of a puppet is a fundamental aspect, based on which classifications have been made by puppet theatre theoreticians, particularly Hans R. Purschke. A distinction is generally made between mechanically controlled figures (i.e. automata, scenic machines, motions) and figures that are controlled by the human body, either directly or indirectly. Directly controlled figures include body puppets and hand puppets. Indirectly controlled figures include string puppets (marionettes) and rod puppets of different types (which can be handled from below, from above, or horizontally), including shadow puppets and water puppets.

Many puppeteers, including Maurice Sand, Maria Signorelli, and Jim Henson, had a preference for hand puppets because these figures convey the expressive gesture of the performers with no mediation, and thus virtually embody their creativity. The contemporary artist Stephen Kaplin elaborated a model for the classification of dramatic figures, from body puppets to computer generated images, depending on the distance ratio between the performer’s body and the figure. This model, which is represented visually as the Puppet Tree diagram (Fig. 2), reflects a notion of puppet theatre encompassing different possibilities, not just the ‘pure’ puppetry with figures manipulated by direct human agency. My idea of puppet theatre conforms to this notion, and thus contemplates manifestations such as storytelling with hand puppets, spectacles with mechanically controlled figures and string or rod puppets, and performances in which live actors interact with figures of different kind.

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Scope of the Research, and Historical and Critical Approaches

Building on previous studies of puppet theatre traditions and museums across Italy this doctoral research has been undertaken with the aim to reconstruct a history of performances with dramatic figures that took place in the Venetian Republic from the Late Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century. This is a vast time frame, and yet it was worth covering it as some rituals and spectacles that took place in medieval Venice left their mark on collective memory in this particular context. The latter was subject to change over time, especially during the early fifteenth century, as the expansion of the *Serenissima* led to the annexation of Padua, Verona, Bergamo, and other provinces of the Veneto and Lombardy, but also cities in contested spaces with the Habsburgs, for example Pordenone. A map of Venice’s mainland in the eighteenth century shows these territories, some of which had distinctive puppetry traditions and/or staging practices, which Venice absorbed to some extent (Fig. 4).

Although spanning a long period of time and a geographical area extending far beyond the Venetian lagoon, this research has been focused around Venice, its society, its performances, and its connections with other contexts from the beginning of to the end of its history as a republic, which means from the Middle Ages to the late eighteenth century (1797). Such a project required, as a preliminary step, acquiring a knowledge of the history and customs of Venice – a context with its own rite, festivals, habits, language, and distinctive style in all the arts. In other words, a context with its own way of seeing and representing the world. As argued by Jim Davis, the context is a crucial issue for systematic approach in theatre historiography because even if it is not always possible to work out an exact aesthetic reconstruction of theatrical representations
from a distant past, it is possible to reconstruct their reception through the study of their
audiences and setting.\textsuperscript{7}

An aspect that has represented a difficulty, and at the same time an advantage in
pursuing this endeavour is the fact that not all the performances with figures that were
staged in Venice kept pace with the major cultural evolvements of their day. As Jurkowski
has remarked, puppetry does not accord with accepted cultural periods as “it has its own
historical rhythm: it has adhered to ancient forms of theatre longer than the dramatic
theatre, sometimes even several centuries longer.”\textsuperscript{8} With this statement he alluded for
example to performances with hand puppets, which appear to have survived almost
unaltered from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries as basically envisaging the
manipulation of a “glove” with head and hands within a portable booth. Some forms of
spectacle with scenic figures, instead, originated and evolved as artistic achievements
mirroring the aesthetic and cultural values of a particular historical moment. Others
revived earlier practices or stemmed from the absorption of influences from neighbouring
or distant cultural areas. In order not to lose touch with the wider rhythm of life in
Venice and Europe, the manifestations in question have been presented following a
chronological time line, but with a cautious approach to the concept of “period style.”\textsuperscript{9}

The historical account has digressions where needed, for example to highlight
elements that come from earlier traditions or would recur in future developments of the
type of performance examined. Moreover, critical analysis complements the discourse
bringing to the fore the most significant aspects under the artistic and cultural points of
view, eventually harnessing connections with other art forms and/or cultural traditions

\textsuperscript{7} J. Davis, K. Normington, and G. Bush-Bailey with J. Bratton, “Researching Theatre History and
Historiography”, in B. Kershaw and H. Nicholson (eds.), \textit{Research Methods in Theatre and Performance}
\textsuperscript{9} Periodisation in theatre history is a problematic aspect, which I approached reflecting on the issues
raised by T. Postlewait in his articles “The Criteria for Periodisation in Theatre History”, \textit{Theatre Journal},
40:3 (Oct. 1998), 299–318; and “The Concept of “Period Style” in Cultural History: Problems in
to assess interaction, shared purposes and common aesthetic principles. This has been done bearing in mind Jurkowski’s theorisation of the three sign systems of puppetry, and attention has been drawn to the combination of ‘speech, movement, and design’ in the performances and spectacles examined. The construction, aesthetics, and handling techniques of these figures has been analysed, as well as the space and times of performance, with a view to understand their peculiarities, aesthetics, and reception. Following this critical approach, which is synthesised as a diagram in Fig. 3, comparisons have been made between puppetry and storytelling, for example. Additionally, attempts have been made to identify the role that puppetry played in mystery plays, the *commedia dell’arte*, the spectacles of the Renaissance, the opera and collecting practices of the Baroque. Last but not least, light has been shed on the ‘animated’ figures that were staged within the framework of festivals drawing together the arts into a single representation or sequence of spectacles, in either the secular or religious spheres. There is inevitably much overlap across all these aspects, and yet attempts have been be made to keep them separate in the discussion, relating either of them to the time-related phenomenon within which they assume greater significance. In this design, theatrical forms such as puppet opera have been examined after discussing prior developments so that its roots in the court entertainments of the Renaissance could be better explained.

Of course, there are other aspects to consider besides those relevant to this critical analysis, which is mainly steered towards semiology, iconography, and aesthetics. An analysis which, running parallel with historical reconstruction, is aimed at showing how puppet theatre productions in Venice mirrored the cultural values of this unique context, although bringing in elements from different cultural areas.

Some sociological aspects have been brought to the fore, mainly focusing on patrons, foremost artists involved in puppet opera, and audiences, but when possible

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providing biographic details about the puppeteers and scene designers as well. Historic writings of interest revealing the status of street performers in the Venetian society have also been examined. Finally, information about the authorities and laws that regulated theatrical activity in the Most Serene Republic has been provided, eventually making comparisons with other contexts.

A key aspect, which has been discussed more thoroughly in a dedicated chapter, is the relationship between Venice and the Eastern world, and the impact of the resulting cross-cultural dialogue in dramatic performances with figures. As a liminal site between the East and West, Venice is a context demanding research aimed at identifying analogies and differences between different puppet theatre traditions. Researching possible paths of cross-fertilization was therefore a challenge that I could not deny.

Overall, in this dissertation puppet theatre in Venice has not been discussed just as an aesthetic template, but also as an art form to be seen from different stand points, for instance those of theatre history, art history, ethnography, and history of collecting. This implied an interdisciplinary approach, and the need to rely on the work by scholars examining aspects relevant to puppet theatre, and yet pertaining principally to other spheres, particularly music. As a result while writing this dissertation I had to use specific terms in puppetry, art history, theatre history, and music, for which I included an explanation which unfortunately may appear superfluous to some readers, but necessary to others.

Methodology, Literature Review, and Sources

As noted above, in order to conduct effective research in Venice it was first necessary to acquire a knowledge of the history of its unique context, at first through secondary sources and specific literature, and then through primary sources such as chronicles and archive documents. I therefore approached Venice reading Frederick Lane’s masterpiece,
Venice. A Maritime Republic, Martin da Canal’s Les Estoires de Venise, and then Marco Polo’s Travels with raised awareness. Then, I became acquainted with Venice’s governmental structure, magistracies, ambassadors, noble families, confraternities, and religious institutions thanks to Alvise da Mosto’s guide to the documentary funds preserved in the State Archives of Venice and the multi-volume Storia di Venezia.

Pompeo Molmenti’s Storia di Venezia nella vita privata tells much about the private life of the Venetians, and so does Giuseppe Tassini’s Curiosità storiche veneziane, with its many useful anecdotes about the toponyms of Venice. This author also describes the festivals, spectacles, and pastimes of the Venetians in his Feste, spettacoli, divertimenti e piaceri degli antichi veneziani. A well-known book on this topic is Giustina Reiner Michiel’s Origine delle feste veneziane, which is often quoted in articles and essays on specific celebrative events. These are are discussed with scholarly thoroughness by Edward Muir in his Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice, which is an invaluable starting point for any researcher approaching the Venetian world. The theatrical life in Venice cannot be understood without a knowledge of its festivals, liturgical calendar, and rite, the so-called patriarchino. These aspects have been discussed by Eleanor Selfridge-Field in her Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice.

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15 G. Tassini, Feste, spettacoli, divertimenti e piaceri degli antichi veneziani (Filippi: Venice, 1961).
16 G. Reiner Michiel, Origine delle feste veneziane (Tipografia Alvisopoli: Venice, 1852).
18 Il patriarchino is discussed in Chapter I. Also useful is G. Diclich’s Rito veneto antico, detto Patriarchino (Rizzi: Venice, 1823).
which is an outstanding tool for Baroque music and theatre historians. Its follow up, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660–1760*, adds rationalised information to catalogues of Venetian operas from 1637 to the first half of the eighteenth century written by the contemporary chroniclers Antonio Groppo and Giovanni Carlo Bonlini (1673-1731). These catalogues list some of the puppet operas that were staged in Venice, whilst the *Memorie teatrali di Venezia* by Cristoforo Ivanovich (1620-1689) includes a wealth of information about theatrical performances also in the private sphere. Details about representations in outdoor public spaces, private settings, and theatres can also be found in Gradenigo’s manuscripts in the Museo Civico Correr, Venice. Earlier, and as comprehensive, are the *Diarii* by Marin Sanudo (1466-1536), a primary source that no scholar could overlook in Venice.

The specific literature on puppet theatre for the purpose of this research was as essential as the secondary sources about Venice listed above. According to the philologist, theatre historian, and honorary president of UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette) Henryk Jurkowski, Charles Magnin’s *Histoire des Marionnettes en Europe* remains a milestone in the historiography of puppet theatre as a reference for other scholars who have focused on their own countries, including George Speaight in England, Purschke in Germany, John E. Varey in Spain, and Ferrigni in Italy. Nonetheless, Jurkowski’s *History of European Puppetry* has added much to Magnin’s

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work. Surprisingly, John McCormick did not include Jurkowski’s work in *The Italian Puppet Theatre*, co-authored with Alfonso Cipolla. Structured by theme, this book mainly summarises published information about puppetry traditions from different regions of today’s Italy (Piedmont and Lombardy), focusing on the nineteenth century. The volume that provides the most accurate description of puppets and puppeteers from different cities of the Italian peninsula is the *catalogue raisonné* of the Museo Castello dei Burattini Giordano Ferrari in Parma, where historic pieces are shown by area and family of provenance. Also analytical are the catalogues of two major exhibitions of hand, rod, and string puppets from different parts of Italy that were held in Italy in 1980 in Rome and Milan. Eighteenth-century Venetian marionettes were shown in Verona in 1983, and Mira in 1985, and their images are published in the relevant exhibition catalogues.

An enlightening book on the relation between marionette theatre and music is *Musica e Marionette*, written by the musicologist Giusy Barbagiovanni. As interesting is Paola Campanini’s *Marionette barocche*, principally dedicated to the puppet operas that were staged in the theatre of the Venetian Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni in early-eighteenth-century Rome. Miklos Horány’s *The Magnificence of Esterháza* is the only book offering detailed information about the splendid eighteenth-century marionette of the Hungarian Prince Nicolaus Esterházy, which is no longer extant. Its repertoire included puppet operas with scores by Haydn, and its apparatus also included scenery designed by the Lombard painter and poet Pietro Travaglia. A few drawings of his

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angle-perspective scenes survive in the archives of Budapest. The marionettes, probably crafted by Venetian puppeteers in Vienna, are lost.

Although documentary evidence testifies to the existence of several marionette theatres that were set up in the palaces of the foremost noble families of Venice in the eighteenth century, only two are extant. One is at the Ca’ Goldoni Museum in Venice, where it is permanently displayed together with a collection of Venetian marionettes dating from the 1690s to the 1730s (Fig. 54). An essay with the photographs and technical information about this collection was published by its curators in 2010. The other theatre, equipped with its two original sets of six Venetian marionettes, is at the V&A Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, London (Fig. 56). A description and photograph of the centre stage of this beautiful marionette theatre and set of six characters of the *commedia dell’arte* are published in the web site of the V&A Museum of Childhood. The other six figures, unpublished, are in storage.

A remarkable collection of nearly one hundred Venetian marionettes dating between the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century survive in the Davia Bargellini Museum (Figs. 22, 69, 70, and 81). Nearly half of them are in storage, including some incomplete pieces that are very interesting to see because their construction can be examined (Figs. 46 and 74). This museum also owns an eighteenth-century marionette theatre from Bologna equipped with five settings (Fig. 71). Some information about the history of the collection can be found in the museum catalogue.

The Museo Sant’Agostino in Genoa permanently displays a few Venetian marionettes of the mid-eighteenth century, along with a later marionette theatre from

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31 Information on this theatre can be found in the institutional web site of The V&A Museum of Childhood: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O98537/marionette-theatre-unknown/; 16 September 2014.

32 R. Grandi (ed.), *Museo Civico d’Arte Industriale e Galleria Davia Bargellini* (Comune di Bologna: Bologna, 1999), 174-180. I was able to examine all the puppets and scenery preserved in this museum.
Lombardy (Fig. 67). The Museo Castello dei Burattini Giordano Ferrari in Parma owns the only sixteenth-century Venetian hand puppet extant (Fig. 21). It also houses two rare Venetian hand puppets of the eighteenth century (Figs. 95 and 96).

Two eighteenth-century marionettes by a Venetian puppeteer and a Bergamasque one who were active in Vienna in the late seventeenth century, and also some late eighteenth-century scenes depicting Venice are in the Museo del Burattino in Budrio, near Bologna (Figs. 65 and 66).

Since 1956 the Musées Gadagne, and more particularly the Musée des Marionnettes du Monde, Lyon, owns a gathering of fifty Venetian marionettes dating between the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century. Forty pieces in this ensemble are extremely precious as they are rare examples of Venetian marionettes measuring 64-80 cm in height (Figs. 37 and 38). Like the other ten pieces, whose heights range between 28 and 34 cm, the aforementioned string puppets belonged to Léopold Dor’s collection comprising 1911 pieces, nearly six hundreds of which were marionettes from different parts of the world.

A small, yet interesting ensemble of eighteenth-century Venetian marionettes is in the Maria Signorelli Collection in Rome, and few more examples survive in private and public collections.

The collection in the Borromeo Palace Isola Madre on Lake Maggiore mainly comprises Lombard marionettes, but also a few Venetian ones as well as eighteenth-century lighting equipment and small-scale scenic machines reproducing the coeval ones that

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36 The catalogue entries of the Venetian items in this collection, which are unpublished, were provided to me by Michèle Prelonge, the Archive Manager of the Musées Gadagne. Information on the Musée des Marionnettes du Monde and its collections can be found in the institutional web site, http://www.gadagne.musees.lyon.fr/index.php/marionnettes_fr; 16 September 2014.
37 Information about the Maria Signorelli Collection in Rome can be found in the official web site, http://www.collezionemariasignorelli.it/; 16 September 2014.
were used in opera theatres (Figs. 41 and 43). A rare Venetian mechanical theatre of
the 1730s is the Museo Don Giovanni Guiso in Orosei, Sardinia (Fig. 89). Finally, a
collection of exquisite eighteenth-century rod puppets from China, which I believe to be
relevant to this research topic, are displayed in the little known Museo del Burcardo,
Rome (Figs. 82-86).

The historic puppets and marionettes preserved in the above museums are not
the only dramatic figures that I examined. Two movable sculptures of the Crucified
Christ dating to the late fifteenth century are preserved in Venice (Figs. 16 and 17).
Further six dating between the mid-fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century are
the districts of Pordenone and Belluno (Fig. 18). Additionally a fifteenth-century
Crucified Christ with movable arms and a coeval Entombment sculptural group is extant
in Verona (Fig. 15). Figures of this kind would fall in the category that Magnin defined
as that of 'hieratic puppets', adding to two more classifications based on the type of
audience, 'aristocratic puppets' and 'popular puppets'. Although this classification is
undoubtedly applicable in this case, and appropriate also in other examples that will be
discussed in this paper, it cannot be used systematically in Venice, where elaborate shows
were eventually attended by both learned and less discerning audiences in public theatres.

Aside from dramatic figures, other materials preserve the memory of the
performances under examination, for instance scores, libretti, and festival books of the
sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These are preserved principally in
Venice, in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, in the library of the Fondazione Cini, and
in the library of the Ca’ Goldoni Museum. Many of the libretti of interest are in Milan,

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38 Three nineteenth-century marionette theatres drawing inspiration from earlier exemplars in the
Venetian residences can be seen in their original setting at the Borromeo palace in Isola Madre, Lago
Maggiore. Further information about these little theatres may be found in M. Natale, The Borromeo
39 E. Carrone (ed.) I teatri di Nanni Guiso /Museo Don Giovanni Guiso. Guida illustrativa (Municipality
40 Information about the Museo e Biblioteca Teatrale del Burcardo can be found in the institutional web
in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense. Fifty-one scenarii (play plots) of the commedia dell`arte are in the Museo Civico Correr, and it is probable that at least some of them were adapted for puppet theatre. The same applies to Flaminio Scala`s scenarii, first printed in Venice in 1611. Earlier sources of interest, including illuminated manuscripts with troubadour songs and a gradual with the notation of some responsories that were used in mystery plays, are preserved in the Biblioteca Civica of Padua. Since the time in which troubadours and jugglers were active at the court of Azzo VI of Este, and particularly after the annexation to the Venetian Republic, Padua has played a major role in innovating and running theatrical life in Venice over the centuries through performers, playwrights, academicians, and patrons.

Other primary sources provide information about representations with dramatic figures that were staged in Venice. A famous one, often quoted in specific literature, is Della Christiana moderazione del teatro by the Jesuit prelate Gian Domenico Ottonelli (1584-1670). This treatise sheds light on the social status of street performers during the seventeenth century, the position of the church on their activities, and the different kinds of puppets that they used in their shows. Archive documents such as decrees on theatrical activity, family inventories, and manuscripts with chronicles of different periods have been found in Venice in the State Archives, and the library of the Museo Civico Correr. Other relevant material is preserved in the State Archives of Padua.

41 Venice, Museo Civico Correr, MS 1040. Published by C. Alberti, Gli scenari Correr. La commedia dell`arte a Venezia (Bulzoni: Florence, 1996).
43 This material is referenced in detail in Chapter 1.
Mention should be made of the wealth of visual evidence, including drawings, paintings and engravings, which depict puppet players, their performances, and their audience in Venice. These primary sources, comparable to contemporary chronicles, are preserved in various museums of Venice for instance the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, the Museo del Settecento Veneziano in Ca’ Rezzonico, the Museo Civico Correr, the Querini Stampalia picture gallery, and the Cini Foundation. Special mention should be made of two medieval miniatures, unpublished in theatre literature, and representing a scornful Jew in the Passion of Christ, as discussed in detail in Chapter I. One of them, which appeared on the antique market in recent years, is held privately. The other one is in the Newberry Library in Chicago. In Vicenza, at Palazzo Leoni Montinari, a collection of eighteenth-century Venetian paintings, including some from Longhi’s famous ‘Charlatan’ series, is permanently displayed. Perhaps the more alluring depiction of puppeteers and street performers in Venice is Joseph Heintz the Elder’s Piazza San Marco at Carnival Time (1640), now at the Galleria Doria Pamphilii in Rome. Also to be mentioned are three paintings by Canaletto (1697-1768) that belong to English collections: the first one is Piazza San Marco: Looking West from the North End of the Piazzetta (1744) in The Royal Collection, London; the second is Piazzetta verso la Libreria (1740-41) in The Castle Howard Collection, York; and the third one is A Puppet Show on the Piazzetta (c. 1740) in the Ashmolean Museum of Art, Oxford. Other works of interest are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Galleria Sabauda in Turin, and the Museo Teatrale della Scala and Biblioteca Nazionale di Brera in Milan.

Oral and performance traditions open ways to imagination and speculation, without which archive research is sterile in theatre historiography. Where appropriate information provided by the puppeteers named in the acknowledgements have been reported as an integration to documentary and visual evidence. It is worth remarking that in this study the images of interest were approached not only as aesthetics works of
art in their own right, but also as historical documents which encode valuable evidence for the stage practice of their times, according to an approach that is generally accepted in theatre historiography.45 Finally, thinking about practical issues while examining visual records of spectacles has allowed me to notice details which, rather than being insignificant, can tell much about the figures that were used, including their archetypes, origins, and provenance.

**Dissertation Structure**

Investigating the written, visual, and material sources described above enabled me to discover finds that can be regarded as original contributions to the historiography of puppet theatre. They are discussed in this dissertation, which is divided into three parts. Part 1 includes Chapters I, II, and III, recognised as a precursor and background to the latter parts of the thesis. Part 2, comprises Chapters IV, V, and VI, where the focus is on puppet opera and private theatre. Part 3 includes the concluding Chapter VII, where the emphasis is on puppetry in the public sphere. The content of each chapter is presented briefly here below.

The first chapter offers an insight into Medieval Venice focusing on liturgical drama, mystery plays, and civic ritual with display of movable sculptures in this context. The second chapter sheds light on the protagonists and figures of theatrical life in Renaissance Venice, which included puppetry within the framework of the *commedia*

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dell`arte and a popular invention called *mondo novo*, and a wealth of mechanically and indirectly controlled figures. Presented in the third chapter are the spectacles with wondrous figures that were staged in the outskirts of Padua by two illustrious patrons of the arts, the Paduan Pio Enea II degli Obizzi and the Venetian Marco Contarini. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the debut of puppet opera, and the performances of this genre that were staged in the private and public theatres of Venice during the seventeenth century. Also examined are the performances that were held in Rome in the domestic theatre of the Venetian Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni from the late seventeenth century to the first decades of the eighteenth century. The history of puppet opera and plays in Venice continues in the fifth chapter, also making comparisons with performances staged in contexts that absorbed the Venetian legacy, Hungary for instance. Shedding light on the Venetian eighteenth-century marionette theatres that are extant, attention will be drawn to the role that these objects played in the history of collecting. In the sixth chapter the chronological account will be suspended for a moment to leave room for some reflection on the relationship between Venice and the Orient. The depiction of Venice in Arabic shadow plays will be discussed and, conversely, the depiction of Eastern identities in Venice`s representations with puppets. The notion of `East` emerging through the *libretti* of puppet operas that were staged in Venice will be the starting point for investigating the way in which different ethnicities were depicted in these representations. In this design not only the written sources will be examined, but also relevant marionettes portraying Armenian, Middle-Eastern, and Asian characters. Additionally, possible cross-fertilisation will be investigated in terms of narrative, iconography, and, not least, construction of the performing figures. The seventh chapter is dedicated to puppet performances in the open-air spaces of Venice. It sheds light on the ways in which Venice is represented in puppet theatre, and puppet theatre is represented in the images of Venice painted by eighteenth-century artists. The history of
puppet theatre Venice ends in this chapter as the eighteenth century saw the fall of the Republic, and thus the end of its history as an independent empire.

Virtually ‘pulling the threads’ of the puppets presented in this paper to stage a few episodes of Venice’s cultural history, some concluding remarks will be made to highlight the elements which, in my view, mirrored the essence of Venice.
PART 1

HIERATIC FIGURES AND EARLY INVENTIONS
Chapter I

Dramatic Figures of the Middle Ages

The history of puppet theatre from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages is obscure as is the early history of Venice, which is imbued with sacredness and myth. The origin of this city is set by tradition in 421 A.D., the day of the Christian feast of the Annunciation (25 March). This religious mystery is blended with the announcement of the founding of Venice as, according to legend, an angel appeared to Saint Mark in a dream and prophesised that a beautiful city would be founded on the island of Rialto, and forever be the keeper of his remains.¹

Some late Roman sources reveal the existence of incolae lacunae (‘lagoon dwellers’) in the area called Venetia at that time, but the first settlers probably were refugees fleeing from north-eastern Italy who escaped the early fifth-century incursion of the Visigoths, that of the Huns some fifty years later, or more likely the 568 invasion of the Lombards.² Recent excavations produced finds whose radiocarbon dates give direct evidence for human occupation in the sixth and seventh centuries, lending support to the tradition of settlement by refugees from the Lombard occupation of the mainland.³ We do not know if any mimes and puppeteers were amongst these refugees and brought their arts into this settlement, which would become an increasingly autonomous Byzantine outpost until its independence de facto was recognised with the Pax Nicephori in 803. This date ideally marks the beginnings of the history of Venice as an ‘identity’,

² Lane (1973), 1-7. See also Molmenti (1889).
a city like no other that developed its own artistic traditions, including puppet theatre with its many forms.

A knowledge of puppet theatre as an art form and Venice as a context requires reconstructing history with a view to grasping the essence of these two entities, which interact with one another as ‘living beings’, borrowing Carlo L. Ragghianti’s words.\(^4\)

The history of Venice, struggling yet dealing with opposing powers – for instance the Byzantine Empire and Church, the Kingdom of France, the Holy Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church, and the spread of the Ottoman Empire – is the history of a peculiar context, which absorbed cultural influences from different areas while creating its own artistic traditions. Puppet theatre mirrored this complexity more than many other art forms that developed in Venice because its expressions can rely on three semiotic systems – verbal language (speech/text), visual language (images/figures), and body language (movement/gesture), eventually complemented with music. Each of these semiotic systems could be a vehicle for aesthetic principles and traditions that originated, developed, and declined in different cultural areas at different times in history, and yet evolve assuming context-specificity in Venice.

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the reconstruction of a history of performance with figures in medieval Venice through evidence revealing the use of ‘animated sculptures’ during liturgical drama, mystery plays, and dramatised civic rituals. Comparisons will be made with analogous phenomena that took place in other cities of medieval Europe with a view to identifying similarities and differences, thus bringing to the fore the peculiarities of the Venetian art forms combining visual and oral narratives.

The Influence from French Culture

The legendary account of the origin of Venice reveals the role that Christianity, through its liturgy, rituals, and feasts, played in the cultural and theatrical life of this city since the very beginning of its history. Later historical accounts, instead, bear witness to the relevance of the cultural influences that contributed to the formation of the Venetian identity. Particularly incisive was the cultural influence from France, whose literary, musical, and oral traditions left their mark on medieval Venice.

Martin da Canal’s chronicle, *Les Estoires de Venise*, written in the French vernacular between 1267 and 1275, testifies to the presence of a French speaking community in Venice and its permanent settlements established in the Levant by the crusaders and their Latin European allies in the second half of the thirteenth century. French literary culture appears to have come to Venice also through Padua, arguably a cultural context with a strong sense of identity before and also after its annexation to the Most Serene Republic in 1405. Earlier *Duecento* manuscripts preserved in Padua, Bologna, Florence, and Paris bear witness to the presence of troubadours, including the French Aimeric de Peguilhan (c. 1175-1230), and Rambertino Buvalelli da Bologna (c.1201-1221) active at the court of Azzo d’Este VI (1170-1212) and his wife Alice de Chatillon as well as at the castle of the Counts da Camino near Treviso (no longer extant). Particularly worthy of interest is the illuminated manuscript catalogued as ‘N’ in Padua, Biblioteca Civica, because the miniatures therein show the importance of gesture as a sign system depending for its origins on the rhythmic articulation of the rhyme scheme and verse.

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5 Da Canal (1275).
structure of troubadour song, with or without instrumental accompaniment. That different means of expression intertwined in storytelling is made clear in Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s perceptive treatise *Poetria nova*, written after 1213: ‘In reciting aloud, let three tongues speak: let the first be that of the mouth, the second that of the speaker’s countenance, and the third that of gesture’. The *Poetria Nova* incorporates Ciceronian fundamentals of invention and arrangement, Horatian doctrine on decorum, and instructions on style, including the tropes (figures of words and figures of thought derived from the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*).

Accordingly, an almost similar three-sign-system interrelation was used by troubadours to engage their aristocratic audiences – verbal language/narrative to evoke imagery through poetic expressions and rhetorical devices based on text; interpretive speech modulating the voice and following the rhythmic shape of poetry (an ability that the storyteller may lack); and gesture/movement of the hand and/or body, with decorum and following the same rhythm with or without musical accompaniment. Analogously, puppet players could engage their audiences with three semiotic systems – visual language/narrative to evoke imagery through figures, and eventually oral narrative; interpretive speech of the figures through the voice of the performer, not necessarily with decorum; and movement of the figures through the hand and/or body of the performer with or without musical accompaniment.

Aside from stylistic and thematic aspects, the main difference between storytelling and puppetry lies in the materiality or immateriality of the figures used to

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convey meaning, which are ‘imaginary’ in storytelling and ‘imaged’ in puppetry (Fig. 3). This implies that in puppet theatre visual narrative through figures is essential, and usually subordinates or even replaces verbal narrative.9 Representations with a narrator commenting on a set of sequential images displayed in a portable structure or dialoguing with puppets would survive in Venice until the end of the Republic (1797). The absence of the narrator, with the inevitable loss of literary devices stirring imagination, is compensated by the presence of two-dimensional or three-dimensional images. If interpretive speech is also absent (dialogue between figures through one or more puppeteers, or figures and audience) the images become more iconic. Their mode of representation also changes in terms of quantity and quality. For instance, more images may be needed to show all the episodes of a story that is no longer recounted. Moreover, the construction of the figure usually changes in order to replace non-verbal dialogue with gestures and movements conveying meaning, to be executed by means of direct or indirect handling systems. In performances with figures lacking verbal language, image and movement tend to be highly symbolic. Yet, symbolism implies that the narrative is already known to the viewer. That is probably the reason why dumb figures were mainly used for the representation of religious themes or myths in both Eastern and Western traditions. When speech is absent music is always present, firstly because the figures need to follow a rhythm, and secondly because music as a language can emphasise the meaning conveyed through movement and image, for example rendering the idea of happiness, fear, sadness, and so on.

Evidence that puppet players and storytellers shared the same audience in the fourteenth century is provided by two illustrations in Jean de Grise’s *Li romans du bon roi Alexandre* (1339-44) now in Oxford, Bodleian Library (MS 264). While the text and

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miniatures of this famous manuscript describe the legendary wonders of the East that Alexander the Great saw during his travels, its *marginalia* show different forms of court entertainment and pastimes, including fowling (021v and 44r), tilting (51r), chess and other games (60r and 70v), dance (51v), performances with trained animals (72r, 73r, and 76r), storytelling with musical accompaniment and masked performers (021v), and puppetry (54v and 76r). The puppets shown in two *marginalia* could be either hand puppets or rod puppets operated from below by a puppeteer, who remained hidden behind the curtains of a theatre box shaped like a castle, which was thus called *castelet* in French (Fig.7). As will be discussed in more detail below, this structure could also be used in mystery plays to make interaction possible between ‘animated’ figures and live performers on a stage with no unity of space, for instance with hell to the left, the earthly world at the centre, and the garden of Eden to the right.

**Venice’s Porta da Mar: a Gate for Liturgical and Feast-day Drama**

According to Jurkowski, ‘puppets almost certainly assisted at the creation of mystery plays, although little documentation is now to be found’.\(^\text{10}\) Figures of a different kind could make liturgical drama extremely moving, and be a precious resource for the staging of mystery plays, some of which featured complex characterisation and form.\(^\text{11}\) Furthermore, as incorporating craftsmanship traditions, the aesthetics and construction of these figures could materially contribute to engaging local audiences in representations that mirrored their identities, although ostensibly treating widespread subjects or themes ‘imported’ from other contexts.

A play that could be represented with figures and live performers is the *Jeu*, or *Mystère d’Adam – Ordo Representacionis Ade*, one of the earliest dramatic texts that has

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\(^{10}\) Jurkowski (1996), 67.

survived as dating to the twelfth century, although transcribed in a manuscript of the second quarter of the thirteenth century in Tours, Bibliothèque Municipale (MS 927, cc. 20r - 40r). The first section of the play is semi-liturgical because it indicates by textual incipit seven responsories (Gregorian chants sung as part of the Matin service in the cycle of prayers known as the Divine Office) to be performed by a chorus at certain points in the action. Although the singing of Gregorian chant varied significantly from region to region, most of the responsories indicated in the Jeu d’Adam were usually included in Matin services across Europe, whether for monastic or non-monastic churches. Their text and musical notation has been found in manuscripts in Verona, Padua, and Aquileia.

Aquileia was a foremost centre of Gregorian chant and had its own rite, which originally was closer to the Gallican rite than to the Roman one. The Aquileian rite was adopted in Venice, but with local variations that made it unique. Called patriarchino, this rite owed its greatest debt to the Gregorian calendar, and would never be abolished in the basilica of San Marco. An ongoing research project undertaken by the Schola Gregoriana ‘Aurea Luce’ with a view to investigating musical and liturgical aspects of

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13 See C.T. Downey, ‘Ad imaginem suam: Regional Chant Variants and the Origin of the Jeu d’Adam’, Comparative Drama, vol. 36, nos. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2002-03), 359-390. The manuscript in Verona dates to the XIth century and is preserved in the Biblioteca Capitolare, XCVIII. The manuscripts in Padua and Aquileia are not referenced, but are amongst those listed in René-Jean Hesbert, Corpus Antiphonalium Officii, 6 vols. (Rome: Herder, 1963-79). The seven responsories, to be sung in the order usually found in French monastic matin service, are Formavit igitur; Tulit ergo, Dixit Dominus ad Adam, Dum deambularet, In sudore vulnus tui, Ecce Adam quasi unus, and Ubi est Abel.

the repertory of Gregorian chant in San Marco may gather evidence on Venetian
versions of the reponsories in the Jeu d’Adam in the future.\footnote{\text{15}}

Written with rhymed dialogues in Old French and stage directions in Latin, Le
Jeu d’Adam features two biblical episodes that Sepet designated as ‘drame d’Adame et
Eve’ and ‘drame d’Abel and Caïn’ as recounting the Temptation and Fall of Adam and
Eve (vv.1-590), and the story of Cain and Abel (vv. 591-744), respectively.\footnote{\text{16}} The seven
responsories indicated in these episodes were usually sung in the Matin service of
Sexagesima or Septuagesima across Europe (in Venice they would be sung in Sexagesima
as Septuagesima does not exist in the patriarchino). The first section of the play with the
two biblical episodes is followed by the Ordo Prophetarum (vv. 745-944), which
conforms with the tradition of Ordines prophetarum (with more than twenty versions
surviving in manuscripts across Europe).\footnote{\text{17}}

Jean-Charles Payen doubted that the Ordo Prophetarum in the Tours manuscript
could be an integral part of the Jeu d’Adam because in his view it was lectio to be read,
rather than performed.\footnote{\text{18}} This observation was refuted by Richard B. Donovan, who
argued that the Ordo Prophetarum developed from the pseudo-Augustinian sermon
Contra Judeos, Paganos, and Arianos, which gradually turned from lectio into liturgical
play to be performed in cathedrals.\footnote{\text{19}} Many scholars agree with Donovan’s idea that the
Ordo prophetarum in the Tours manuscript was an integral part of the Jeu d’Adam,
although unlike the first two episodes it was usually performed in the Octuagesima

\footnote{\text{15} Schola Gregoriana Aurea Luce, Treviso. On the research project see the institutional website of this
school and research centre: http://www.aurealuce.it/eng/?page_id=29; 16 September 2014.
\text{16} M. Sepet, Les Prophètes du Christ. Etude sur les origines du théâtre au moyen âge (Didier: Paris,
1878), 87-94.
\text{17} K. Young, Ordo Prophetarum (Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters: Madison, 1922), 1.
\text{18} See J. C. Payen, ‘Idéologie et théâtralité dans l’Ordo representationis Ade’, Etudes anglaises Grand-
\text{19} R. B. Donovan, The Liturgical Drama in medieval Spain (Pontifical Institute of medieval Studies: Toronto,
1958), 123.
(Advent). Also widely agreed is the idea that it was followed by a conclusive episode, possibly based on the two texts that were copied thereafter, the *sermo* with the ‘Prophecy of the Sibyl’ and the eschatological *Dit des quinze signes di jugement dernier*. In this view, reaffirmed in the most recent edition of the *Jeu d’Adam* with commentary by Véronique Dominquez, the mystery cycle in question would start with the Original Sin and end with the Day of Wrath.21

Some scholars made connections between the episodes of the *Jeu d’Adam* and the iconography of the medieval sculptures decorating the façades of the French and Spanish cathedrals in which they were performed. Donovan associated the sequence of ‘sculpted prophets’ on the façade of some Spanish cathedrals with the ‘performing prophets’ who recited therein the *Ordo Prophetarum* and *Sybil prophecy* of the Benediktbeuern Christmas play written in a twelfth-century manuscript in Rouen.22 Van Emden and Mâle related to the *Jeu d’Adam* the Romanesque reliefs depicting episodes from the *Old and New Testament* on the western façade of the cathedral of Notre-Dame la Grande in Poitiers.23 More particularly, above the portal at the extreme left of the Poitier cathedral is the twelfth-century relief depicting the *Temptation of Adam and Eve*, followed by *Nebuchadnezzar* and the *Prophets* (Daniel, Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah), the *Annunciation*, and the *Tree of Jesse* at the extreme right. Other scenes of the *New

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The Testament can be seen above the right portal. The ‘Second Advent’ is represented in the
cusp with a sculpture of Christ between the sun and moon in the mandorla shape
surrounded by cherubs. These associations between iconography in the visual arts and
narrative in liturgical drama find a parallel in Venice, where medieval sculptures and
mosaics that can be related to the two episodes of the Jeu d’Adam survive in the Basilica
of San Marco and the doge’s palace – the emblems of religious and secular Venice.

In the basilica of San Marco the sculpted Prophets of the ancient porta da mar
are four in number (Abacuc, David, Sophonia and Zachary), and set in niches alternated
with mosaics depicting four further prophets and the figure of Christ. Also known as the
‘gate of peoples’, this open portal in the south façade towards the sea rivalled in its
grandeur the main doorway in the west façade. In 1503 it was walled in to create the
Zen chapel, where the Prophets can still be seen (Fig. 6).24 These iconic sculptures were
made of Istrian limestone between the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth century
by a Venetian artist blending the Romanesque and Byzantine styles with the teaching of
Benedetto Antelami (1150-1230) from Parma.25 Recent restoration work brought their
unusual polychromy to the original vividness and thus revealed how these sculptures
could stir imagination, especially in an audience listening to a sermon or narration while
looking at them. The Ordo prophetarum could be recited as lectio inside the basilica,
where thirteen prophets surrounding Christ are depicted in the presbiterium and
baptistery, but could also be performed as a play at the porta da mar, whose twelfth-
century arch is decorated with the heads of ten prophets amidst leaf scrolls.26 The recurring

24 T. E. A. Dale, ‘Cultural Hybridity in medieval Venice: Reinventing the East at San Marco after the
Fourth Crusade’, in H. Maguire and R. S. Nelson (eds.), San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice,
151-192.
(2008), 7-35.
Close-ups of the sculptures during restoration can be seen in ‘The Statues of the four Prophets Return in
Grand Style in the Zen Chapel in the Basilica of Saint Marco’ (2011) published in
26 The thirteen prophets in depicted in the cupola of the presbiterium are Isaiah, Geremia, Daniel, Abdia,
Abacuc, Osea, Jonah, Sophonia, Aggeus, Zackary, Malachia, Solomon and David.
presence of the prophets in the basilica can be interpreted as an element not only reflecting
the Byzantine iconography, but also the Byzantine homilies. In his study of Eastern theatre
Giorgio La Piana affirmed that this type of religious drama, which was reminiscent of the
secular mimic tradition, exerted an influence upon some Western sermon-based Prophet
plays as they offered dramatic treatment of some prophets not included in the Roman rite.27
In Venice, a context imbued with influences from the East and West, it is possible that
Prophet plays were performed at the ancient porta da mar. Hints at religious drama can
be found therein, for example the fragmentary thirteenth-century mosaic depicting the
Nativity (associable to the Officium pastorem). It may also be noted that a twelfth-century
Magi sculptural group (associable to the Ordo stellae) was intended for this portal.28

The sequence of the thirteenth-century mosaics decorating the atrium, from the
porta da mar to the main doorway facing west (Fig. 5), is a clue suggesting that this
environment could be used to perform a cycle of mystery plays structured like the Jeu
d’Adam in the twelfth century. The mosaics on the vault of the southernmost dome
represent the story of the Creation based on the Byzantine manuscript known as Cotton
Genesis.29 In the same bay, the lunettes feature the story of Cain and Abel. Finally, the
mosaics on the ceiling of the dome at the main entrance represent the Last Judgement, after
which the viewer entering the basilica from the main portal would see the Apocalypse.30

Penny Howell Jolly, who studied the iconography of the mosaics of the Genesis
in San Marco, observed that the figures therein convey meaning through their
appearance, postures, and conventional or symbolic ‘gestures of both speech and

27 G. La Piana, Le Rappresentazioni sacre nella letteratura bizantina dalle origini al sec. IX
(Grottaferrata, 1912), 161-176, and 306. On the prophets see D. Satran, Biblical Prophets in Byzantine
Palestine (Brill: London, 1994).
28 See H. Maguire, ‘The Antiketos Icon and the Display of Relics in the Decoration of San Marco’ in H.
Maguire and R. S. Nelson (eds.), San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice (The Dumbarton Oaks
Research Library and Collection Trustees for Harvard University: Washington D.C., 2010), vi-vii (plan of
San Marco) and 98-99.
29 London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho, B VI.
action’. For example, God speaks gesturing with His right hand to bring into being the objects of Creation and direct the ongoing action of the universe. The Roman adlocutio gesture of a raised hand generally indicates a spoken text from the Bible, with right-hand gestures indicating proper speech whilst left-hand gestures indicate duplicity, anger, or admonition. With these theatrical expedients the figures ideally bring the spoken word into visual narrative through movement, although only depicted, so that the viewer could associate action to verbal narrative, especially if dialogue and/or storytelling were contextually performed.

The boundary between the visual arts and drama was blurred at the porta da mar in San Marco as narrative through images and narrative through text intertwined in this audience-attracting portal leading to the atrium, which would be a perfect space of display and performance even at a time in which drama was moved outside the church in medieval Europe. From the porta da mar facing south-west through the domes to the main doorway facing west it was the viewer who moved from one representation to the next throughout the atrium while attending the relevant liturgical officia.

The scarcity of thirteenth-century sources in Venice, however, has not allowed theatre and music historians to fully reconstruct a history of liturgical drama and mystery play in this distinct context, and as a consequence a history of the dramatic figures that were used therein. Nonetheless, an influence from the French cultural milieu is demonstrated through a manuscript with Christmas plays surviving in Padua and also the manuscripts with text and musical notations of Easter liturgical offices found in Padua, Cividale del Friuli, and Venice which will be discussed in more detail.

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32 In this perspective Zorzi defines as ‘scenic windows’ the sequential images of later narrative cycles such the *Story of Saint Ursula*. See L. Zorzi, *Carpaccio e la rappresentazione di Sant’Orsola. Ricerche sulla visualità dello spettacolo nel Quattrocento* (Einaudi: Turin, 1988).
That the *Jeu d’Adam* was known in Venice is possible, and its performance with regional variants can also be hypothesised considering the proximity of the Gallican rite with the *patriarchino*, the existence of a shared repertoire of Gregorian chants, and iconographic sources.

I would argue that puppetry was used in the representation of the *Jeu d’Adam* in the twelfth century as the stage directions written in the Tours manuscript state: ‘Tunc serpe artificiose compositus ascendit iuxta stipitem arboris vetite, cui Eva propius adhibebit aurem, quasi ipsius ascultans consilium’ (then, an artificial serpent climbs up around the tree that was prohibited to Eve, and she puts her ear up as to listen to some advice from it). The adjective ‘artificiose’ suggests that the serpent was not a live performer, but a figure able to ‘move’ and ‘speak’ by artifice. Another stage direction in the Tours manuscript explains that the dialogue between Eve and Diabolus/serpent should take place in the *paradisus*. The Garden of Eden is described as a platform surrounded by silk curtains hung to such a height that would allow only the head and shoulders of the performers standing behind it to be seen. Hence, Roger Pensom speculated that in the twelfth century the *paradisus* could be a raised stage with a functional space below. This kind of structure would be ideal for a performer manipulating a rod puppet from below, and remaining hidden while giving motion and vocal power to the climbing and speaking serpent. A miniature depicting the *Temptation and Expulsion of Adam and Eve* in the Anglo-Norman Holkham Bible (1327-1335) offers a possible representation of the scene described in the *Jeu d’Adam*. Adam and Eve stand on a raised platform at the sides of the female-headed serpent climbing the tree of knowledge.

33 K. Young (1951), II, 9-10 and 14-16.
34 *Ordo Representacionis Ade*, vv. 293-296.
35 ‘Constituatur paradisus loco eminenciori; circumponuntur cortine et panni serici, et altitudine ut persone, que in paradiso fuerint, possint videri sursum ad humeros’, *Ordo Representacionis Ade*, cc. 20r.
and tempting Eve (Fig. 8). According to Woolf this image brings in narrative elements from oral and performance traditions drawing from earlier sources such as the apocryphal gospel *Vitae Adae et Evae*, which inspired Petrus Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica* (c. 1173).

The twelfth-century *Temptation of Adam and Eve* on the façade of the Poitiers cathedral conforms with the iconography discussed here above. The same applies to a sculpture that dates to the fifteenth century, but is reminiscent of earlier models. The artwork in question is *Adam and Eve* by Antonio Rizzo (Verona, c. 1430 - 1499), a painted marble sculpture which originally stood in the courtyard of Palazzo Ducale in a lower niche of the Arco Foscari. Built around 1484, that arch was adorned with sculptures aimed at presenting the *doge* as the ruler of an orderly realm, Venice. Rizzo’s *Adam and Eve* is believed to be a few decades earlier than the arch, as reminiscent of the late-Gothic style from Lombardy. Its iconography, which appears to be unprecedented in Venetian sculpture, could be inspired by Masolino da Panicale’s *Temptation of Adam and Eve* (1425) in the Brancacci chapel in Florence – one of the earliest Italian depictions of the female serpent on the tree of knowledge flanked by Adam and Eve. It is possible that Masolino da Panicale elaborated that figurative solution from a source provided by his Humanist patron, Cardinal Branda da Castiglione. The latter administrated the See of Lisieux in Normandy, where the Holkham Bible circulated. Through Masolino da Panicale, Rizzo introduced in the Venetian sculpture

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an iconographic solution that was not new in the visual arts of the Anglo-Norman context, and had long been represented on the medieval stage across Europe.

Interestingly, a copy of Rizzo’s *Adam and Eve* (Fig. 9) stands on the *Planets and Zodiac* column (1342-1355) at the south-west corner of the Palazzo Ducale’s portico, which would be a space of performance for puppet players and street performers in the eighteenth century, as will be discussed in Chapter VII. The main relief decorating the capital of this column shows *Earth and the Creation of Man* and bears the inscription ‘De limo Deus Ada de costa formavit Eva’ (from earth God created Adam, and from his rib Eve). The moulding of a figure that becomes animated is an ideal episode to be staged with the interaction between a live performer to be perceived as a gigantic supernatural being and a puppet to be perceived as life-size human being.

Such a solution exploiting scale difference between angels and human souls, or angels and devilish creatures can be seen in various panels of the cycle of *Angels* painted by Guariento d’Arpo (c. 1310-1370) for the ceiling of the Cappella Carrarese in Padua, and now in the Musei Civici of that city. Guariento also frescoed the walls of the Cappella Carrarese, whose sequence of episodes from the *Old Testament* is believed to have a thematic relation with the angelic host once on the ceiling. Born in Verona, and active in Padua and Venice from 1338, Guariento’s work blends the late-Gothic style with the Byzantine canons and Giotto’s innovations, and brings in iconographic elements from different sources, including the wall paintings of the Chartres cathedral.

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40 While the original column is preserved in the Museo dell’Opera, a later copy stands at the southern angle of the Doge’s Palace. See A. Manno (ed.), *Il poema del tempo. I capitelli del palazzo ducale di Venezia. Storia e iconografia* (Venice, 1999). See also O. Demus (edited by G. Tigler), *Le sculture esterne di San Marco* (Electa: Milan, 1995); and W. Wolter, *La scultura veneziana gotica (1300-1460)* (Venice, 1975). A plan with photographs of all capitals of the columns of the doge’s palace is available online at http://meningiorgiovenezia.xoom.it/PDC.htm; 16 September 2014.

The iconography of the narrative cycle in Padua has been studied by Murat making stylistic comparisons with Guariento’s Paradise, frescoed in 1365-66 in the doge’s Palace, Sala del Maggior Consiglio, and ruined after the fire of 1574. Arguably, it is possible that visual narrative of the cycle in Padua started with the Genesis and ended with the Last Judgement. Guariento’s God Instructing Adam and Eve survives as a detached fresco from the Cappella dei Carrarese, but two subsequent scenes depicting the temptation of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the garden of Eden are lost. Also lost are other biblical episodes that were frescoed on the walls.

What makes Guariento’s Angelic Host particularly interesting for the purpose of this study has never been noted. This is the theatrical character of the figures and their attributes, which suggests relationship with mystery plays. Some of the angels depicted by Guariento wear a white tunic: this iconographic detail finds a correspondence with the alba indutus, the white alb worn by deacons and also by ‘angels’ in liturgical drama performed in convents and cathedrals. The famous Liber Ordinarius from the Cathedral of Padua testifies to archaic polyphony in that city at least from 1304-1306. Archaic polyphony was inextricably linked with liturgical drama, which shared religious iconography with the visual arts. The stage directions of the Jeu d’Adam in the Tours manuscript specify that the coryphaei singing the responsories of this play had to be dressed with white albs, and based on such an indication Lynette R. Muir speculated

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44 Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS E.57, Liber Ordinarius.
that the *coryphaei* were meant to be part of an ‘angelic host’ in the representation.45

Three panels by Guariento in Padua depict an angel dressed in a white alb and holding a naked figurine: it is a psychopomp, an angel escorting to the afterlife an *animula* (soul), whose state of grace is symbolised by the white embroidered cloth in which it is wrapped.46 Such a figural solution exploiting scale difference to represent the interaction between supernatural beings and humans or spirits in the visual arts found a parallel in mystery play cycles starting with the *Creation* and ending with the *Day of Wrath*, or Second Advent, as was the case of the *Jeu d’Adam* according to some scholars.

Directly controlled figures such as body puppets and hand puppets could be used in these performances, but also indirectly controlled figures such as rod puppets, string puppets, and jigging puppets. Jigging puppets, controlled by strings to be pulled horizontally, are shown in the oldest record of puppetry in Europe, the famous miniature with the inscription ‘Ludus Monstruorum’ in Herrad von Landsberg’s *Hortus Deliciarum* dating 1175-1185 (once in the library of Strasbourg and now lost).47 Figures of this kind, called *marionettes à la planchette* in France, would be used by street players across Europe until the nineteenth century.

Guariento’s work is therefore an invaluable source offering clues to understanding how mystery plays could be represented with different kinds of ‘animated’ figures in the Veneto during the Middle Ages. The *animulae* held by an angel in the panels painted for the ceiling of the Cappella dei Carraresi and now in the Musei Civici of Padua can be likened to depictions of mystery plays performed with

45 Muir (1973), 27-28 and 35.
figurines or rod puppets handled from below (Figs. 10 and 11). The black devil dominated by an angel of the hierarchy of Powers (*potestates*) in six surviving panels clearly resembles a string puppet handled from above (Fig. 12). Figures of this kind recur in six further panels depicting an angel of the hierarchy of Dominions (*dominationes*), holding a scale to weigh the *animulae* as a puppeteer would handle the rod controlling a group of puppets from above. I would contend that Guariento d’Arpo’s *Angels* painted for the Cappella Carrarese in Padua can be regarded as portrayals of live performers interacting with puppets in mystery plays in Venice and Padua during the Middle Ages.

‘Animated’ Sculptures for the *Passio, Depositio, and Entombment of Christ*

Various source materials and artefacts bear witness to the existence of movable sculptures that were used in liturgical drama and mystery plays in different contexts throughout medieval Europe. Before focusing on the examples that have survived in the territories once ruled by the Venetian Republic and the liturgy or rituals to which they relate, some attention must be given to a recent find, a loose full-page miniature that appeared on the antique market in London in 2010. Although its provenance is not Venice, this miniature adds to the puzzled history of puppet theatre because it could be the only known illustration showing a rod puppet as related to the Passion of Christ (Fig. 14). Named *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* and depicting the instruments of the Passion of Christ, this miniature has the characteristic qualities of the Bohemian illumination at the time of Wenceslas IV, King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor (1361-1419). Under his reign, from the second half of the fourteenth century to the first decades of the fifteenth century, Prague became an important centre for the production of luxury manuscripts. Additionally, this city is renowned for its old puppetry tradition, which in

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48 Christie’s London, sale 7911, *The Arcana Collection: Exceptional Illuminated Manuscripts and Incunabula* (Part I), 7 July 2010. I am thankful to Dr. Anne-Marie Eze for bringing this miniature to my attention.
Bohemia also gained momentum with the rise of liturgical drama from the twelfth century. Preserved in the National Gallery in Prague is a mid-fourteenth-century sculpture of the crucified Christ with movable arms, formerly in the Barnabite church, where it was used in Easter liturgical drama and mystery plays.\textsuperscript{49} The presence of a rod puppet representing a Jew within a manuscript of Christological subject from Bohemia, therefore, appears to bear witness to the performance traditions of this kingdom, with which Venice had intense trade and cultural exchanges.\textsuperscript{50} Something that Bohemia and the Venetian Republic also had in common by the time this miniature was produced was the presence of a Jewish community, tolerated for \textit{raison d’état}, yet ruled with discriminating laws.\textsuperscript{51} In Prague, during the Holy Week of 1389, some Jewish people were accused of having mocked a priest and the host that he was bringing to a sick Christian. Regardless of whether that episode truly happened, it inflamed violence as the Jews` revulsion against Christian `idolatry` toward the cross and the host had been made explicit with the publication of a poem that parodied Christ`s Passion, the \textit{Passio Iudeorum Pragensium}, or \textit{Passion of the Jews of Prague}.\textsuperscript{52} The contrast between Jews and gentiles left its mark on visual culture as well as drama across Europe.\textsuperscript{53} More or

\textsuperscript{49} K. Kopania, \textit{Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages} (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010), 250, no. 15.


less explicitly, that contrast also emerges in the iconography of the Bohemian miniature under examination and a coeval, comparable image that will be discussed later.

Christ as the Man of Sorrows was one of the most popular devotional images in northern and central Europe from the mid-fourteenth to the late fifteenth century, and was produced in a variety of artistic media.\(^{54}\) In the Bohemian miniature the figure of Christ stands on the tomb displaying his wounds and is surrounded by the instruments of his Passion (Fig. 14). One of them is a big-headed rod puppet operated from below by a hand to the left. Objects of this kind developed in medieval France, where buffoons carried a mock sceptre topped by the head of a jester, called *marotte*, through which they interacted with the audience.\(^{55}\) Examples of jester sticks from mid-fourteenth-century France are preserved in Florence, Museo del Bargello. The object-figure shown in the miniature under examination represents the ‘spitting Jew’, an established element in fifteenth-century Passion imagery, especially in the Franco-Flemish area, where Christ’s prosecutors were often depicted wearing a pointed hat as an external marker of their identity.\(^{56}\) The iconography of this character is based on medieval elaborations of the Passion of Christ, narrated in the four *Gospels*. A possible source is the *Arma Christi*, a fourteenth-century English poem.\(^{57}\) While in the *Gospels* it is not the Jews who mock Christ, but the Roman soldiers, in the *Arma Christi* the Jews are depicted as offenders, prime torturers, and responsible for Christ’s sufferings. Accordingly, in visual representations of the theme, the spitting Jew is presented as an instrument of the Passion, thus ‘objectifying a person as a thing’, according to Judova.\(^{58}\) The spitting Jew


\(^{55}\) Magnin (1852), 115.


\(^{57}\) The *Arma Christi* poem survives in nearly twenty manuscripts, including the *Bohun Hours* (England, c. 1380) in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.4.4. See Cooper and Denny Brown (2014).

\(^{58}\) J. Judova, ‘Wound of Christ and Arma Christi in Bohun Hours’, paper given at the University of Glasgow Senior Honours 2011/2012. published online: http://www.academia.edu/1645156/Wound_of_Christ
puppet depicted in the *Man of Sorrows* miniature presented herein epitomises this process of objectification.

The process of objectification of a character through gesture is what makes the difference between the *gioco di mano* (literally ‘play of the hand’) performed by joculatores, jongleurs, or jesters ‘juggling, or telling a tale with the hand’ and those ‘juggling, or playing a puppet with the hand’.\(^5\) The relationship between these two modes of performance is so close that they were defined with the same wording in the Romance domain. And yet a salient difference between the two can be understood by comparing the spitting Jew puppet in the *Man of Sorrows* with the figure of the mocking Jew depicted in the English *Stations of Rome* roll (c. 1400) in Chicago, Newberry Library (Fig. 13).\(^6\) In this last image the identity of the character is revealed by the pointing gesture of his disproportionate hand. Identity and gesture are ‘objectified’ in the marotte, a performing figure that is much more iconic, and thus powerful in conveying meaning through representation and performance.

In medieval Europe the earliest forms of drama developed from the Christian liturgy in the tenth century, more particularly from the *Quem quaeritis* of the Easter liturgy that formed the kernel of liturgical drama, which evolved into mystery plays in the twelfth century.\(^6\) It is to enable a deeper connection to the mystery of death and salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ that in late fourteenth-century

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5 In John Minsheu's *Spanish-English Dictionary* (London, 1599), the wording ‘jugadors de manos’ is translated as ‘those who juggle or tell a tale with the hand’.


61 For an introduction to medieval drama with a good literature review of fundamental texts see M. Kobialka, *This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (University of Michigan Press: 1999), 1-34.
German areas the dramatised *paschal triduum* ceremonies, including the *Adoratio Crucis*, *Depositio Crucis* and *Elevatio Crucis*, started to be enacted using a movable sculpture of the crucified Christ instead of the cross as symbol.\(^6\) The construction of this type of sculpture, to which medieval sources often refer as *imago crucifixi* and *imago salvatoris* or *imago resurrectionis*, envisaged mechanisms allowing certain parts of the figure to move while detaching it from the cross to depose it as a dead body in the sepulchre, and later take it out as a resurrected being. This ritual practice spread across Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The *Adoratio, Depositio, Elevatio crucis*, and *Visitation sepulchri* liturgical offices were contained in missals, and thus were included in the annual cycle of liturgical ceremonies observed in a given diocese, monastery, cathedral, and parish church.

In many cultures of various epochs the contemplation and manipulation of figures of various types, including puppets, was meant to stir spiritual vision in human beings and convey their relationship with the supernatural. Christianity makes no exception. In the fourteenth century the introduction of figures in liturgical ceremonies re-enacting the deposition of the crucified Christ in the sepulchre, and thereafter His rising from death, offered a more evocative and engaging vision compared to representations with an individual impersonating Christ. Aside from their powerful visual impact, the sculptures reproducing the features of the crucified Christ had a status that could not be assigned to a live performer in that they were devotional objects, often perceived as being endowed with special powers or truly impersonating the Saviour (especially if containing the Host). This particular aspect entailed the problem of idolatry, which would have led to the end of these dramatic figures following the Reformation, especially in central Europe.

As already mentioned, Venice had its own liturgy, called the *patriarchino*, whose offices could include a blessing from the *doge*. The latter had authority over this particular liturgy, which was practised throughout Venice until 1456 and thereafter remained in force only in the basilica of San Marco. In medieval Venice, therefore, the Holy Week rites were unparalleled as the *doge* played a role of co-protagonist with the priest in the liturgical ceremony. On Good Friday, during the morning procession, a coffin containing the body of Christ in the form of a consecrated Host – not a crucifix – was carried under a funeral baldachin to the basilica of San Marco. Here the Host was placed in the ciborium by the officiating priest, who sealed its door with the signet ring received from the *doge* at the high altar. On Easter morning, in the presence of the *doge*, the priest would break the ducal seal and open the ciborium, which he would find empty. He would thus announce the *Surrexit Christus*, and give a ‘kiss of joy’ to the *doge*, to be passed down to each member of the governmental hierarchy. The peculiarity of this liturgy, emphasising the worldly and spiritual power of the *doge*, could explain why no movable sculptures of the crucified Christ have been found in the basilica of San Marco.

Nonetheless, as will be discussed in more detail below, figures of this kind have been found in two monastic churches of Venice. Moreover, a fragmentary late fourteenth-century manuscript with text and musical notation of a *Planctus Marie*, to be performed on Good Friday before the *Depositio* and *Entombment*, has recently been found in the library annexed to the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione, known as Santa Maria della Fava, in Venice. This incomplete source is very close to the famous *Planctus Marie*

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63 Muir (1981), 77.
64 Reiner Michiel (1852), 3-13.
65 The manuscript is earlier than this *oratorio*, which was built in 1480. See F. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare. Descritta in XIV Libri* (Venice, 1581), II, 51r.
et aliorum in die Parasceven in Cividale del Friuli as the latter includes rubrics for gestures and separate roles for the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Evangelist, and the three Marys.66

In his recently published book, Kopania affirmed that one hundred and twenty-six medieval sculptures of the crucified Christ with mechanisms making them appear as ‘animated’ survive in Europe, and twenty-three are mentioned in written sources.67 The majority of these sculptures are made of wood and have a mechanism allowing the arms to be folded down along the body. The largest number of them is located in today’s Italy, mainly in Umbria and Tuscany, with Florence boasting the greater ensemble. Few exemplars survive in the former domains of the Most Serene Republic, including the Veneto and Fruli-Venezia-Giulia, although some cities in this last region were contested spaces between Venice and the Habsburg Empire.

In the Veneto an early-fifteenth-century Crucified Christ with movable arms survives in the church of San Giacomo (originally Santa Cristina) in the Palazzolo di Sona, near Verona (annexed to the Venetian Republic in 1405).68 Also dating to the fifteenth century is the Entombment in the church of Santa Toscana, Verona (Fig. 15).69 This sculptural group includes a deposed Christ with movable arms, Joseph of Arimathea, Saint John the Evangelist, Mary the mother of James, the Virgin Mary, Mary Salome, Mary Magdalene, and Nicodemus the Pharisee. The dramatic expressions of these figures, some of which appear to be speaking characters, make this work extremely inspiring. Sculptural groups of this kind became popular in Umbria and Tuscany in the early

67 Kopania (2010), 246-287.
69 See Tameni (1999), 60. See also Kopania (2010), 273.
fifteenth century, but appear to have been much rarer in the Veneto. The presence of this remarkable ensemble in Verona owes much to the history of the place of worship for which it was commissioned. Built in 1037 as a chapel annexed to the graveyard of the Black Friars (Benedictines), the church housing *The Entombment* since the mid-fifteenth century was dedicated originally to the Holy Sepulchre. Only following the burial of the body of Toscana de’ Crescenzi (c. 1280 – 1343) therein, the church started to be referred to the name of this saint, to which it was dedicated in 1489.

A similar group presumably existed in Venice in the church of Sant’Andrea della Zirada, Venice, where a *Deposed Christ* dating to the third quarter of the fifteenth century has been brought to scholarly attention after its restoration in 2009 (Fig. 16).

The aforementioned monastic church was founded in 1331 by four Venetian noblemen, who followed the rule of Saint Augustine. After being rebuilt in 1479, the church was consecrated in 1502 by Giulio Brocchetta, Archbishop of Corinth. Perhaps on that occasion this movable sculpture of the *Deposed Christ* and the figures of the *depositio* were donated to the church. The authorship of the *Deposed Christ* has been tentatively attributed to Domenico Merzagora, known as the Master of Santa Maria Maggiore in Val Vigezzo mainly active in Lombardy during the second half of the fifteenth century.

Such an attribution is based on stylistic comparison with the *Crucified Christ with Movable Arms* (c.1468), also tentatively attributed to Merzagora, formerly in the church

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72 I am thankful to Dr. Luca Mor for this information. The report of the remedial conservation work executed on the *Deposed Christ* at the Università Internazionale dell’Arte, Florence, is part of the MA thesis at that institution submitted by D. Canover, *Una statua lignea policroma del XV secolo. Recupero, conservazione, valorizzazione*, 2009.


74 The attribution by D. Canover was validated by Dr. Matteo Ceriana and Dr. Simone Guerriero of the Istituto di Storia dell’Arte della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice. See Canover (2009), 3.
of San Michele in Isola, Murano and now in the monastery of San Francesco della Vigna, Venice (Fig. 17).75

Sculptural groups of this kind have not been found in Padua, where two fourteenth-century manuscripts with text and musical notation of liturgical officia to be performed on Good Friday survive. Rather than reflecting German influence, these officia to be sung by two voices in a sort of dialogue reveal the influence from French culture, and more particularly from the Paris tradition.76 The same applies to the liturgical plays that were performed in Cividale del Friuli, including the Planctus Marie et aliorum in die Parasceven, Visitatio sepulchri, and Resurrectio.77

In the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region a Crucified Christ with movable arms dating from around 1520 and tentatively attributed to Michael Parth (c. 1475 – 1551) can be seen in the church of Santa Margherita in Sappada, near Belluno (annexed to the Venetian Republic in 1404).78

Two slightly later examples survive in the district of Udine (annexed to the Venetian Republic in 1420). One is the Crucified Christ with movable arms dating to c. 1520 in Pontebba, in the church of San Giovanni Battista.79 The other is the coeval Crucified Christ with movable arms that also is in Pontebba, in the church of Santa Maria Assunta.80

80 Ibid.
Three further ‘animated’ sculptures are extant in the district of Pordenone, which was ruled by the Habsburgs until it became part of the Venetian Republic in 1508. One is held in a private collection in Valvasone: it is a late-fifteenth-century sculpture with articulated arms and legs, originally covered with a layer of calf skin, which conferred a higher degree of naturalism to the body.\(^{81}\) This characteristic is reminiscent of the famous fourteenth-century *Crucified Christ* in the Burgos cathedral, which had movable arms and head, a blood receptacle in the torso, calf skin lining, genuine hair, and nails made of animal horn.

The other two sculptures in Pordenone share the peculiarity of having embedded in their mouths a mechanism consisting of a wooden tongue attached to a metal blade, which was connected to a wire or thread passing through the head and ending within a small opening at the neck, eventually concealed by a flap; by pulling the wire, the movable tongue would shift up and down or left to right and vice-versa.\(^{82}\) The movable tongue was not meant to protrude beyond the lips, thus conferring a deadly appearance to the figure of Christ, but rather give the impression that it could speak after rising from death.\(^{83}\)

Dating to 1466 is the *Crucified Christ* with movable tongue in the Chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angeli (known as ‘Chiesa del Cristo’), Pordenone (Fig. 18), where it is permanently displayed in a niche behind the altar. The author of this sculpture is the Umbrian sculptor Giovanni Tedesco (1449-1494), whose ‘dramatic’ figures, lyrical yet with a realistic rendering of physical details such as veins and wounds, stirred an emotional

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\(^{81}\) See Perusini (2000), 31; and Perusini (2006), 191-205. See also K. Kopania, ‘“The idolle that stode there, in myne opynyon a very monstrous sight”’, On a number of late-medieval animated figures of the Crucified Christ’, in A. Lipińska (ed.), *Between Technique and Semantics* (Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego: Wrocław, 2009), 141-142. And lastly Kopania (2010), 273.

\(^{82}\) See Kopania (2010), 116-119.

experiencing of the Passion of Christ. His three-dimensional portrayals of the crucified Christ often incorporated a mechanism that allowed certain parts of the head or body to move. Moreover, according to Elisabetta Francescutti, Tedesco’s workshop produced numerous figures of the Crucified Christ in *papier maché* for religious plays that were performed in the area around Lake Garda.\(^8^4\) These dramatic figures met the aims of the orders committed to strengthen Christian faith through engaging representations. Whether re-enacting the Passion, the Deposition, or the Entombment of Christ, the liturgical drama performed with the movable sculptures under examination certainly combined text, image, and dynamism.\(^8^5\)

A *Crucified Christ* with movable tongue that is similar to, but slightly later than the one in Pordenone can be seen in Porcia in the church of San Giorgio.\(^8^6\) Formerly in the repository of the church, in 1999 this artefact underwent remedial conservation work and scientific analysis which allowed some interesting aspects of its manufacture to be discovered. For instance, the body of this sculpture was made out of one piece of lime wood, and the truthful rendering of the veins was obtained by gluing hemp strings on the wooden surface to be covered with *mestica* (a mixture of gypsum and pigment with an animal-glue binder) and varnished. In the restoration report no mention is made about the movable tongue that originally was fitted in the mouth cavity.\(^8^7\)

Although movable sculptures of the crucified Christ are one of the more interesting manifestations of religious culture, until recently the aspects relating to their construction as objects of ritual performance, rather than merely objects of cult, are

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\(^8^5\) On the aspect of dynamism in liturgical drama see L. della Pietra, ‘Crux Triumphalis. Il dinamismo della croce nella liturgia medieval’, in Mor (2014), 81-86.

\(^8^6\) See Perusini (2000), 197-198. See also Kopania (2010), 269.

\(^8^7\) The remedial conservation work was executed by Anna and Andreina Comoretto, Pordenone, who published their restoration report online: http://xoomer.virgilio.it/elmaset/croce.html; 16 September 2014.
have been overshadowed by aesthetics and iconography in scholarly literature.

In Italian the designation *crocefisso deposto* applies to sculpted figures of Christ that could be detached from the cross, regardless of whether they had mechanisms allowing for the movement of certain parts of the body. In some cases old restorations led to the loss of articulation, as detached limbs were simply glued back to the torso.

An interdisciplinary approach to this type of objects was promoted with a symposium on the wooden crucifixes of Venice and its territories in the mainland, held at the Gallerie dell’Accademia on 18 May 2012.

It appears that in the Western world all kinds of figures crafted in a design that made them perceivable as animated beings able to ‘move’ and/or ‘speak’, shared until recently the destiny of being overlooked by historians, perhaps because of their nature as objects in between the visual and performing arts. Besides epitomising the interrelationship between different spheres, these dramatic figures testify that the survival of both material and immaterial aspects of culture relied on craftsmanship and performance traditions handed down from one generation to another. In this perspective Maurice Sand argued that several fantastic and religious types indispensable to the scenario of mystery plays were preserved over the centuries by street performers, including those who ‘took the risk of displaying their pupazzi or magatelli’. Late seventeenth-century figures of that kind, including two devils and a matto (fool arrayed in a long white shirt with a large collar, a night cap, and a white mask), can be seen at the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, Venice (Fig. 48).

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88 The proceedings of this symposium have been presented within the framework of the exhibition *L’uomo della croce: l’immagine scolpita prima e dopo Donatello*, Padua, Museo Diocesano, on 28 November 2013. See E. Francescutti (ed.), *Crocifissi lignei a Venezia e nei territori della Serenissima. 1350-1500. Modelli diffusione restauro*, (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani, 2013).

Marys, Marione, and Marionettes

Documentary sources testify to the existence of different kinds of puppets in the Middle Ages, but no exemplars of this epoch are extant. Such a lack of material evidence is a great loss for Venice as the historian Giustina Reiner Michiel claimed that the word marionette originated in this city in connection with its annual festa delle Marie (Feast of the twelve Marys). The history of this distinctively Venetian festival will be outlined before focusing on the etymology and significance of the terms defining the figures that were used in its rituals. Finally, attempts will be made to understand their characteristics, dramatic role, and reception based on medieval accounts.

The earliest documentary source about the festa delle Marie is a record within the 1143 Constitution of Pietro Polani, which ordered an annual procession of boats to celebrate the ancient feast of the Purification of Mary. The feast is also described in thirteenth-century sources, including Les Estoires de Venise by Martin da Canal, Pace del Friuli’s poem Descriptio festi gloriosissime Virginis Marie, and the Chronicle of Marco, the latter claiming that the festival commemorated Venice’s defeat of the Istrian pirate Gaiolus in the tenth century. The Venetian notary and diplomat Lorenzo de Monacis (1352-1428) wrote in his Chronicon de rebus Veneti ab urbe condita ad annum MCCCLIV that pirates sought to steal the treasures on processional display while the pageant was going to the church of Santa Maria Formosa during the festa delle

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91 Published in G. Monticolo, La costituzione del Doge Pietro Polani (febbraio 1143, 1142, more veneto) circa la processio scolarum (Rome 1900), 38. Also published in Rendiconti di Reale Academia dei Lincei 9 (1900) 91–133. Cited in T. Devang, ‘Competing Spectacle in the Venetian Festas delle Marie’, Viator 39.1 (Spring, 2008), 107-25.

An anonymous fifteenth-century chronicle imbued with legend the pre-existing ritual of the festival. According to this account, since ancient times twelve underprivileged bride-to-be maidens, symbolically named Marie (Marys), received a dowry, wedding dress, and jewels for their marriage, and blessing by the Patriarch of Venice in the cathedral of San Pietro di Castello. On their way to this church they were seized by Triestine pirates, but rescued - along with the treasures - by the casselieri (carpenters making cases). The latter were rewarded with honours as their victory would be celebrated with the visit of the doge to Santa Maria Formosa each year for vespers on the eve of the Purification of Mary. Also known as Candlemas, the Purification of Mary was one of the Marian feast days in the Byzantine liturgy that Venice adopted from the Aquileian rite.

The Feast of the Twelve Marys was sponsored every year by twelve noble families from two contrade (parishes) chosen by the principle of rotation amongst the sixty paired ones existing in thirteenth-century Venice. Although the festival lasted for eight days, from 25 January to 2 February, its formal rituals began on the eve of 30th January (the feast of the Translation of Saint Mark) with pageants led by the young and adult men and the priest from the designated contrade to the Palazzo Ducale. After paying homage to the doge they would distribute gifts to poor girls, and process into the basilica of Saint Mark, where a Mass was celebrated, possibly in the cappella dei mascoli (chapel of the confraternity of males), originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary. As reported in Martin da Canal’s chronicle, the following day a procession was formed again in Piazza San Marco to reach the church of Santa Maria Formosa singing the Litany of Venice while following a ‘clerc, que seoit desor une chaere, mult richement

93 L. de Monacis, Chronicon de rebus Veneti ab urbe condita ad annum MCCCLIV (F. Corner: Venice, 1758), 12.
94 Published in J. Morelli, ‘Delle solennità e pompe nuziali già usate presso li Veneziani’, in Operette, I, 130-134.
95 Da Canal (1275), XCII.
aparillés a la guise d’un angle, et le portent desor les espaules .iiiij. homes’ (a priest, richly dressed like an angel, seated on a chair, and carried by four men on their shoulders). Once entered in the ‘iglise de nostre dame sainte Marie’ the pageant would see the priest of the other parish, who was ‘aparillés en senefiance de la virge Marie’ (dressed in such a way to symbolically represent the Virgin Mary’). 96 The priest impersonating the Archangel Gabriel would thus stand up, and a re-enactment of the Annunciation as reported in the Gospel of Luke (1: 28-38) would be performed.97 At the end of the ceremony the faithful would go home, but the feast would continue in the afternoon:

Et après manger vont les gens, homes et femes, en les contrees que ont faites ces procession dont je vos ai conté et trovent en .xij. maisons .xij. Maries aparrillees si riche ment et si be l, que c’est une mervoille a veoir. Ele ont chascune corone d’or en lor testes, a pieres preciouses, et sunt vestues de dras a or, et par totes ses robes sunt les nosques d’or et les pieres preciouses et les perles a planté. […] Et l’autre jor après font il autretel feste en lor .xij. maisons.

(And after lunch the people, men and women, go to the [two] parishes where said processions were made, and find in twelve houses twelve Marys, dressed so richly and so beautifully that it is a marvel to see. Each one has a gold crown with precious stones, and pearls on their clothing […] And the following day the same feast is made in these houses).98

The twelve noble or wealthy families (six per each contrada) sponsoring the festival were obliged by law to open their houses to visitors and show the lavishly adorned

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96 Da Canal (1275), XCIV.
98 Da Canal, Les Estoires de Venise, XCVI.
Marys.⁹⁹ This commitment implied taking security measures to prevent theft from their homes and also during the boat procession from the church of San Pietro di Castello to the basilica of San Marco. According to Martin da Canal,

‘Li jors de Nostre Dame ont ciaus des .ij. contrées aparillees .vj. grant nes et les funt najer au chef de la vile, droitement ou demore li evesqe de Venise. […]Et puis entrent dedens, lor dames et lor damoiselles, aparillees mult richement, et metent les Maries enmi les nes. Et en une des nes vont .xI. homes bien armés, lor espees nues en lor mains, et en l’autre nef vont li clers aparillés de mult grant tresor de l’iglise, et es autres .iiiij. nes sunt les Maries et les dames et les damoiselles. Et lors vient li evesque et lor done sa beneison […]. Et lors se partent les nes de la rive […] por faire li ans que doit venir après autretel feste. En tel maniere s’en viennent jusque devant l’iglise de monsignor saint Marc […].

(On the day of the Purification of Mary each of the two parishes adorns six great ships and sails them to the head of town, directly to the See of the Bishop of Venice. […] And then the richly dressed ladies and maidens get aboard, and put the Marys on the ships. One ship carries 11 armed men holding their unsheathed swords in their hands; another ship carries the priests with the great treasure of the church, and the other four ships carry the Marys, the ladies, and the maidens. Then the Bishop gives his blessing […]. And finally the ships depart from the shore so the feast could equally be made thereafter. Hence, they reach the church of Saint Mark).¹⁰⁰

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¹⁰⁰ Da Canal (1275), XCVII.
At the end of the celebration in the basilica the crowns and other jewels of the Marys were stored in the treasury of San Marco as the procurators would lend them out each year for the festival.  

The account provided in Martin da Canal’s chronicle and in thirteenth-century sources in the Archivio di Stato of Venice clearly indicate that wooden effigies were used in the festa delle Marie. As having to be dressed temporarily with the precious robes, it is likely that these pseudo-mannequins had movable arms, a characteristic that made them suitable to be perceived as animated figures in a ‘theatrical’ display. Some historians speculated that these life-size ‘animated’ figures were replaced with live maidens at some point in history. Others, including Reiner Michiel, reported that that the Marys originally were girls, later replaced with wooden effigies for their safety. Gallicciolli simply concluded that the Marys sometimes were wooden effigies and at other times were live girls. Tramontin circumscribed Gallicciolli’s idea to the eight-day duration of the festival on the assumption that the twelve wooden Marys would be stripped of their ornaments after being displayed in the basilica of San Marco: while the jewels would be preserved in the treasury, the robes could finally be donated to the twelve poor maidens. The latter would thus travel in their place with the final waterborne cortège from the piazza San Marco to Santa Maria Formosa, where the festival culminated with the Mass and distribution of white candles. Although not based on direct evidence, Tramontin’s hypothesis sounds plausible. Muir backed it with the fact that a comparable

104 Gallicciolli (1795), VI, 10-11.
105 Tramontin (1966), 415-16.
106 Other than in da Canal’s writing, the itinerary of this procession is resumed in documentary sources in the State Archives of Venice. See Venice, Archivio di Stato, Archivio della Mensa Patriarcale, busta 21, folio 9r; and Archivio di Stato, Maggior Consiglio, ‘Liber primus pactorum’, folio 134r.
switch from effigy to live girl characterised a festive ritual on Ascension Day in Transylvania.\(^\text{107}\)

It appears, however, that in the mid-fourteenth century the twelve wooden effigies symbolising the virtuous maidens allegedly saved by the *casellieri* with the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary, to whom Venice was devoted, had lost their allure of sacredness. Scornful and disorderly conduct throughout the festival induced the Venetian Grand Council to pass a resolution stating that ‘since the *festa delle Marie* has been organised for the devotion and consolation of the whole land, […] from now on the throwing of turnips or any other object is, on pain of a fine of 100 deniers, banned for the duration of the festival’.\(^\text{108}\) Crouzet-Pavan justified the disruptive behaviour occurring during the parading of the Marys through the city with the rivalry between the youths from different *contrade*, which played a central role in the festival.\(^\text{109}\) Devaney argued that the processional displays of wooden effigies to inspire devotion and celebrate virginity was incompatible with the licentious spirit of the Carnival season, in which it fell.\(^\text{110}\) Finally, Muir concluded that the *festa delle Marie* had become anachronistic for various reasons, since ‘the very necessity to offer a historical or legendary justification for the rite reveals a spreading uncertainty about just what this junket of wooden women was supposed to signify’.\(^\text{111}\)

I would argue that a change in taste drew to an end what Jurkowski calls the ‘opalisation’ effect of performative figures like those used in this and other processional displays in Europe by the late fourteenth century. With the loss of their symbolic

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\(^\text{110}\) Devaney (2008), 125.

significance in the collective memory of Trecento Venice, these simulacra of maidens were no longer perceived as ‘animated’ characters, but inanimate objects. Such a shift in the way of seeing the Marys was reflected in language: not without scorn they started to be called Marie de tola (Marys of wood) or marione (big Marys, by way of the suffix ‘one’ indicating ‘large-scale’) in the Venetian vernacular. Still, according to Reiner Michiel, their miniature replicas had come into use and were called marionette (little Marys), a designation coined adding to the word ‘marione’ a suffix that indicates smallness.¹¹²

Although deriving from Mary (the name of the Mother of God in the Christian faith), the word marione and the effigies that it designated had a secular connotation. This explains why the mocking of these statues did not result in accusations of blasphemy, as happened in other fourteenth-century contexts where effigies or relics of saints shown in procession were subjected to various indignities in that they were perceived as not performing their miraculous functions.¹¹³ The word marionette, also belonging to the secular sphere, developed following a path that finds parallels in the Romance domain: the philologist John Orr argued that number of French and Italian words mean ‘doll’ as objectification of motherly comfort, including the term puppa and its derivatives, poupée, poupette, and by analogy Marie and its derivatives, marotte, marionette.¹¹⁴

McKorkmick doubts Michiel’s account, arguing that ‘few scholars take it seriously today’ because ‘the word “marionette” was well established in France by the mid-seventeenth century, but did not come into current use in Italy before the second half of the eighteenth’.¹¹⁵ Such an assertion is based on Magnin’s statement that the term

¹¹² Reiner Michiel (1852), 3-13.
¹¹³ See the cases discussed in P. J. Geary, Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages (Cornell University: Ithaca, 1995) 95-115.
¹¹⁵ McCormick (2010), 5 and 257.
‘marionette’ to designate a puppet first appeared in Guillaume Brochet’s *Sérées*, published Paris in 1584.\(^{116}\)

This is debatable, however. Evidence that the term ‘marionette’ could at least be understood in Venice at an earlier date is provided in the 1536 Venetian edition of *La Couronne et fleur des chansons* by Adrian Willaert (1490-1562), *Maestro di Cappella* at the Basilica di San Marco since 1527. His three-voice *chansons* were composed borrowing literary texts and musical themes from two earlier French compositions typical of the troubadour repertory. In one of these songs a romancer doubts the fairness of the price paid to seduce the girl of his desire, thus objectifying her virtue, and with a word play turns ‘Marion’ into ‘Marionette’ and a dancing maiden into a spinning figurine:

Vous marchez du bout du pié, Marionette
vous marchez du bout du pié Marionet Marion
Vostre beauté tres mignonette m’a esté trop cher vendue
J’amasse mieulx ne l’avoir vue, néantmoins,
Vous marchez du bout du pié, qu’elle soit friquette.
L’autier quant je chevauchoe mon chemin à Lyon
Je rencontray frère Pierre / A tout son grant chaperon.

(You dance on the tips of toes, Marionette,
You dance on the tips of toes, Marionet Marion.
Your beauty is very attractive, yet sold to me too dearly
I wish I had not seen it. And yet
You can dance on the tips of toes, so I guess it was worth.
Yesterday, while I was riding
On my way to Lyon
I encountered Friar Pierre
Everyone has their own *chaperon*.\(^{117}\)

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\(^{116}\) Magnin (1862), 118-119 and 124.

Although the name Marion (also as Mariette, Marot, Maroie) recurs in troubadour song manuscripts, the word marionette has not been found in coeval literary sources.\(^{118}\) The presence of rod puppets in the marginalia of *Li romans du bon Alexandre* discussed earlier, however, is a clue suggesting that the term marionette could be used to designate figures of this kind in the Romance domain, to which Venice was not extraneous.

On the assumption that marionettes were made in fourteenth-century Venice to be distributed to poor girls during the *festa delle Marie*, as suggested by Reiner Michiel, some questions arise spontaneously. Firstly, who crafted these articulated wooden figurines? Drawing from the earlier sources mentioned above, Sanudo reported in his *Diarii* that the procession of the *festa delle Marie* ended in Santa Maria Formosa to honour the parish in which most of the casselieri were based.\(^{119}\) That the ‘little Marys’ could be made by the craftsmen of this guild, who were carpenters making cases, is an hypothesis that sounds possible in the light of a curious coincidence.\(^{120}\) In Bergamo, annexed to the Venetian Republic in 1428 and famous for its hand puppet tradition, carpenters making coffins used their skills to carve the heads and hands of puppets from scrap wood, perhaps to exorcise death after burials.\(^{121}\)

The second question is why would miniature replicas of the *marione* be made in *Trecento* Venice? Perhaps because they reflected the ongoing development of ‘lay liturgical drama’, in which the Franciscan order played a major role using ‘devotional


\(^{119}\) S. Tramontin (1966), 411–412.

\(^{120}\) On the etymology of the word ‘casselieri’ see Galliccioli (1795), 22-24.

\(^{121}\) Not by chance the Museo del Falegname ‘Tino Sana’ in Almenno San Bartolomeo, near Bergamo, houses a theatre box and puppets of the local tradition (mainly dating to the nineteenth century). See C. Rota Nodari, *Il museo del falegname* (Almenno San Bartolomeo, 2000), 3-4 and 45.
aids’, including the use of figures of various kinds. Moreover, we may speculate that the iconography of the increasingly popular Madonna of Mercy set an example for of the use of figures of different sizes in visual representations and performances as well.

We know that in 1223 Saint Francis of Assisi first exhibited small crib figures in Nativity worship, a custom that spread throughout Europe with the preaching of the Friars Minor. In Venice the Franciscans first settled on the lagoon island of San Francesco nel Deserto in the 1220s, and in 1230s obtained permission to build their great church the Basilica of Santa Maria Gloriosa ai Frari, which would be completed in 1338. By that time the devotion to the Madonna della Misericordia (Madonna of Mercy) had gained momentum as it aroused a sense of belonging, which explains its frequent commissioning by mendicant orders and confraternities. In Venice the building housing the old Scuola della Misericordia was built as early as 1310 and its façade was decorated with a coeval relief of the Madonna of Mercy. Other early-fifteenth-century reliefs depicting this subject can be seen on the façade of the church of San Toma’, on the façade of the Scoleta dei Caleghéri (guildhall of shoemakers) in the same parish, and in two late-Gothic arches in the Calle del Paradiso. The popularity of the Madonna of Mercy would increase after the outbreak of the plague as the Virgin Mary was depicted with an outstretched mantle sheltering the faithful who invoke her protection, usually in a much smaller size.

The iconography of the Madonna of Mercy employs at least two elements that make this image theatrical: a mantle concealing everything behind it, and the scale difference between the Virgin and the much smaller figures at her feet. These are missing in a rare fifteenth-century wooden sculpture of Venetian manufacture at the Museo Civico Correr (inv. Cl. XIX n. 0234), which nonetheless offers an idea of what the slightly earlier marione could look like in terms of craftsmanship and aesthetics (Fig. 19). The use of life-like scale wooden statues of the Virgin Mary and perhaps smaller figures representing the faithful could be used in the performance of Marian devotional plays. These became popular in fourteenth-century France, where they were recited by confraternities during their annual meetings, the so-called puyys. As discussed earlier, a re-enactment of the Annunciation was performed in Venice (although without figures) in the Church of Santa Maria Formosa on Candlemas, the last day of the festa delle Marie. We also know that by 1369-70 other liturgical plays were performed for reverence to the Virgin Mary on the day of the Presentation of the Virgin (November 21) as Philippe de Mézières would commit himself to introducing the dramatic office of this feast to Avignon after seeing it performed in Venice, in the great scuola (confraternity) of Saint John the Evangelist.

In 1379 the Venetian government temporarily suspended the festa delle Marie in order to divert the heavy taxes levied on the citizenship to finance the War of Chioggia with Genoa. The festival was reinstated that same year, but in a different form requiring much less expenditure: there would be no more waterborne pageants, thus no more public display of the Marys, and only a vestigial ducal procession from the basilica of San Marco to the church of Santa Maria Formosa would be made on Candlemas until 1793. In his fifteenth-century chronicle, Giorgio Dolfin (1396-1458) reports that after the

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127 Forty plays that dramatise the miracles of the Virgin Mary survive in the so-called Cangé Manuscript, MS Français 819-820, at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. This codex also lyrical texts, sermons, and illuminations that celebrate the Virgin Mary.
abolition of the feast, the crowns and jewels of the twelve Marys were used to decorate the high altar in the basilica of San Marco during principal feast days.\textsuperscript{129} In the early-sixteenth century, an English traveller saw ‘xiii crownes of fynew golde, and xiii pectorales’ in the treasury of San Marco, where they remained until the end of the Venetian Republic (1797), according to Tramontin.\textsuperscript{130} No information about the destinies of the life-size wooden effigies that had been the centrepieces of this ancient festival for many centuries has been retrieved, and no exemplars are extant. The same applies to their miniature replicas. Yet, large size articulated figures like those used in the processional displays described earlier did not fall into the realm of oblivion. Rather, in Renaissance Venice they would find new life through performance in ephemeral spaces until days of splendour for productions with elaborate rod and string puppets would come in the theatres of the Baroque age, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

\textsuperscript{129} Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS IT VII 794 (8953), \textit{Cronica di Venezia dall’origine fino all’anno 1458 di Giorgio Dolfin, folio 54r}. Cited in Muir (1981), 144.

Chapter II

Puppets, Automata, and Theatres of the World

In Venice, where the *doge* virtually played a *comprimario* role with the patriarch in religious rituals at San Marco, the chasm separating liturgical drama and mystery plays from secular representations with movable figures of angels, devilish creatures, and *marione* may not, after all, be so great. It should not surprise that this particular context, in which the boundaries between the religious and the secular were as blurred as those between East and West, offered fertile ground to the renascence of performing arts and stage design in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

After Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, in 1453, many Byzantine refugees fled to Venice. Amongst these were scholars who carried with them ancient codices preserving the memory of Greek and Roman theatrical texts, which had fallen into the realm of oblivion in the West, and treatises on architecture and stage design that had shared the same destiny.¹

Along with the savants came the mimes, who had preserved intangible relics of classical antiquity, including pantomime and acting with stock characters. Reich argued that while exerting influence on the Byzantine homilies, the Eastern mimes paved way for the development of the stock characters of the Karagöz in the Ottoman Empire as well as those of the *commedia dell’arte* in the West.² Constantine Miklashevsky, Ireneo Sanesi, and other scholars disagreed with Reich because they saw the *commedia dell’arte* as an offspring of the Renaissance that had almost nothing to do either with

¹ See Molmenti (1889), I, 170-171.
Ancient Rome or Eastern mime.³ Lea’s argumentation on the relationship between the commedia dell’arte and commedia erudita (learned comedy) placed in evidence the derivation of some roles in these Renaissance genres from shared archetypes in Plautus and Terence’s plays. Such a nexus is acknowledged also by Katritzky in her book on the commedia dell’arte, presenting with historical rigour visual records as well as case studies of interpretation.⁴

Even in recent years less attention has been deserved to the relationship between the commedia dell’arte and Eastern mime traditions. And yet, an inference can be made thinking about the momarie, which Pompeo Molmenti defined as ‘an ancient form of Venetian theatrical representation’, which was performed starting from the second half of the fifteenth century.⁵ As envisaging the use of masks, body puppets, and scenic figures, mummeries anticipated the rise of the commedia dell’arte and its puppet theatre form on one hand, and on the other the revival of automata, scenic apparatuses, and theatre structures. These two strands of development will be examined in this chapter.

**The momarie**

Uncertain is the etymology of the words momaria or bombaria in the Venetian dialect to define a performance type which, according to Jacopo Morelli, corresponded to the mommerie in French (mummery in English).⁶ Indeed the momaria was meant to be a mute, choreographic, amazing, and lavish, masquerade, whose ludicrous variant was

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called *momaria buffonesca*. The absence of one of these characteristics would arouse discontent in the Venetian audience.

This is what happened on 14 February 1498, when a mummery sponsored by the Florentine merchant Bortolo di Nerli was mocked with a scornful sonnet because, rather than a *momaria*, it turned out to be an ill-interpretation that Sanudo defined as a Florentine *zanza* (froth). From his account we know that there were ‘eight men disguised as sea horses with jousting armours surrounded by youths who had silvery faces, also wore armours and helmets, and carried torches, spears, and many bells while jousting’. This performance, which appears to be reminiscent of the jousts and tournaments set up at the Medici court, evidently was something different from the kind of spectacle that the Venetians expected to see.

Sanudo described several mummeries in his *Diarii*, from which we can assume that dance was an important element, which implied musical performance. Also important was as the visual spectacle. The Venetian diarist recalls *L’edificazione di Troia* (The Foundation of Troy), staged on 13 February 1520 at Ca’ Foscari, in the parish of San Simeone, as 'the most beautiful mummery of all times’. From his description we can assume that different kinds of puppets were used on this occasion as the audience saw ‘a Hydra, a great giant with a snake around Laocoon, an idol, a king and his daughter, and also a peculiar devil with huge flames’.

We can also assume that mummeries could be staged in both private and public performance spaces on festival occasions. Sanudo praised a representation that took place in Piazza San Marco in February 1533 during carnival despite the fact that on 25 January 1526 the Venetian Senate had passed a resolution prohibiting mummery performance on festival occasions, whether private or public, because they violated

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8 Various examples of *momarie* are discussed in Molmenti (1889), II, 1-9.
9 Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXVIII, 253.
sumptuary laws.\textsuperscript{10} It was a pageant of allegorical figures merging with the image of Venice itself and showing up in succession as follows:

Firstly, the goddess Pallas holding a shield and a book, and riding a serpent.
Secondly, Justice holding a sword and a scale, and riding an elephant.
Thirdly, Concord on horseback with a sword and a shield, and holding a palm as a sceptre.
Fourthly, Victory on horseback with a shield and a sword, and holding a palm leaf as a sceptre.
Fifthly, Peace riding a lamb and holding an olive branch as a sceptre.
Sixthly, Abundance riding a serpent and holding a bundle of ears that will spread up at the sound of a shot.\textsuperscript{11}

This processional display evidently was aimed at celebrating the greatness and values of the Serenissima through the appearance of personifications whose iconography would be well known to most Venetians. The marble sculpture of Justice (1441) holding a sword and a scale by Bartolomeo Bon the elder, for instance, could already be seen at the Porta della Carta in the Ducal Palace.\textsuperscript{12} From Sanudo’s account we can understand the meaning conveyed by the mummery that was performed in San Marco, and imagine the visual impact of this spectacle. It would be difficult, however, to establish which animals were figures and which were not. Whilst the horses and the elephant possibly

\textsuperscript{11} Sanudo, \textit{Diarii}, LVII, 531.
were live animals, we can hardly think that the mimes could ride a stork or a serpent, which clearly were fictive. Being staged in a public open-air space, and thus ideally to be seen by a large audience, it is reasonable to think that the ‘animals’ in question were mechanically controlled figures, perhaps moving on carts. It is less probable that they were body puppets, although figures of this kind were not unseen in Venice and neighbouring contexts.13

The mummery staged in 1533 and most of the ones performed in private spaces that were described by Sanudo were organised by the Venetian societies of aristocratic youths called compagnie della calza. The most precious contribution to the knowledge of these societates iuvenum remains Lionello Venturi’s study, in which he published the statutes of the nearly forty-three orders existing in Venice, and useful information about other primary sources documenting their activity.14 Francesco Sansovino described the costumes of the different orders and some of the festivals that were organised by the compagnia dei Sempieterni and compagnia degli Accesi.15 Nonetheless, most of the information available on the private and public festivals with theatrical performances set

13 For example, during the festivals held to celebrate the marriage of Alfonso d’Este and Lucrezia Borgia in Ferrara ‘a Moresque dancer took out some animals measuring six braccia in length, with many heads, and covered with silk: the last one, which was that of the Duke, was covered with golden brocade and black velvet’, as we can read from a letter written by a priest to Marquise Isabella Gonzaga on 2 January 1502. Cited in T. Verdon, ‘“Effetti speciali” nello spettacolo e nell’arte quattrocentesca’, Biblioteca Teatrale, N.S., no. 19-20 (July-December 1990), 7-20.


15 Sansovino (1581), 406-416.
up by the *compagnie della calza* can be found in Sanudo’s *Diarii* covering the period from 1498 al 1533.

The *compagnie della calza* not only organised mummeries on festival occasions, but also balls, plays, and buffoonery shows. On 2 May 1513, for the nuptials of Federigo of Niccolò Foscari and the daughter of Zuan Venier, member of the Council of Ten, the *compagnia degli Eterni* organised a banquet to be followed by the performance of a *commedia* and a ball. Finally, ‘uno bufon, Zuan Polo, fato il balo di le done, fu fato salti forti per do servitor; poi fato cantar a quattro villain da Villa: poi Zuan Polo disse alcune piazevoleze e zugato di man sopra uno schagno, e fo compita la festa’ (a buffoon, Zuan Polo, said some funny things, and made of sleight-of-hand tricks on top of a stool, and the feast was over).16 As already explained in Chapter I, the wording *zugar di mano* (playing with the hand), could be interpreted either as juggling or playing a hand puppet. For this reason Zuan Polo Liopardi (d. 1541) is included in Litta Modigliani’s biographic dictionary of Italian puppet players.17

Playing puppets was only one of the many abilities of Zuan Polo, who embodied the *buffone* tradition of his native city, Padua. To perform in *commedie, intermedii*, or simply entertain guest audiences showing his skills, he was hired several times by different Venetian *compagnie*, including the Eterni, Immortali, Trionfanti, Ortolani, and Floridi from 1504 to 1529. As far as we can assume from Sanudo’s writings, Zuan Polo was an extremely versatile performing artist, able to make acrobatic numbers, mimic acting, dancing, singing, storytelling, and improvised sketches. Especially noteworthy was his metamorphic ability to change, not only his costume, but also his stance, voice, and

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16 Sanudo, *Diarii*, XVI, 206.
accent to impersonate characters epitomising the different ethnicities present in Venice, for instance a Moor, a German, a Greek, a Hungarian, an Albanian, or a Dalmatian.\textsuperscript{18}

The comic effect obtained by staging dialogues between characters speaking different dialects, or with different accents, was an expedient that Andrea Calmo (Venice, c.1510–1571) introduced in his plays, generally considered as an innovation in between the \textit{commedia erudita} (learned comedy) and \textit{commedia veneta alla buffonesca} of the Veneto, like the farces performed by Zuan Polo.\textsuperscript{19} In Calmo’s \textit{mise en scène} the interrelationship between speech, text, gesture, and action was subject to change depending on the skills of the performers and the audience response, something that street performers, puppeteers included, had to get used to if they wanted to make a living out of their art.\textsuperscript{20} According to Ludovico Zorzi, although little is known about the life of Andrea Calmo, from his work we can assume that ‘he had connections with the nurtured consortium of buffoons, actors, and virtuosi who thrive in the lagoon city since the early years of the [sixteenth] century’, including puppeteers.\textsuperscript{21} Interestingly, Calmo is also recorded in Giulio Litta Modignani’s dictionary of puppet players, although no indications about where and when this playwright would engage in this theatrical art are provided in the relevant entry.\textsuperscript{22} From Calmo’s biography written by

\textsuperscript{18} Sanudo, \textit{Diarii}, XIX, 449; and XXXVII, 559-60.
\textsuperscript{22} G. Litta Modignani (1927). See also M. Gorla and R. Leydi in Cecchi (1980), 284-312.
Zillioli we know that he was a ‘very good singer’. 23 This would explain his ability to exploit the natural rhythm of speech in his plays. We know from documentary sources that famous composers used domestic puppet theatres for rehearsals in the eighteenth century, and perhaps Calmo did the same to visualise the relationship between speech and movement in his comedies.24

Lea and other scholars posited that Andrea Calmo was indeed a precursor of the commedia dell’arte, principally because his interchanges between opposing characters (for instance a Venetian proto-Pantalone called ‘the Magnifico’ and a zanni) as well as his tirades became part of the stock speeches of a number of roles in the commedia dell’arte.25 Puppet theatre absorbed the characters, jargons, and counterpoints between different dialects, particularly Venetian and Bergamasque, and thus also owes to the legacy of Andrea Calmo.

Puppetry and the Commedia dell’Arte

Cross-fertilisation between puppetry and the commedia dell’arte was claimed by Maurice Sand affirming that Burattino, a character of the Gelosi troupe, debuted in Florence in the 1580s and collected such a great success that very soon he passed into puppet theatre, and his name became the word used to define all puppets in Italian.26 Conversely, Ferrigni had argued that the name of the character came from the already

24 On Haydn’s puppet theatre see Chapter V.
26 Sand (1915), 252.
existing word ‘burattino’ to define hand puppets or rod puppets, which existed long before the *commedia dell’arte*.\(^{27}\) Considering that iconic characters are a peculiar element in puppet theatre traditions of all cultures, Ferrigni could be right. Moreover when the *commedia dell’arte* declined, in the late-eighteenth century, newly invented stock role puppets without masks were invented in Bergamo, Venice, and many other cities of the Italian peninsula without emulating characters from major theatre.

For the purpose of this study, an aspect of interest is the fact that many figures of the *commedia dell’arte* can be found in museum collections, which bear witness to a shared repertoire between that genre and puppetry. This is particularly true for hand puppets, which were popular above all Bologna, but also in Bergamo and Venice.

Very few sixteenth-century hand puppets survive in the Museo Castello dei Burattini Giordano Ferrari, Parma. One of them is the only Venetian hand puppet from Renaissance Venice that is known to be extant. It is a *Friar* whose costume perhaps is not entirely original, and yet the stylised wooden head with worn out glass-paste eyes reveals its four hundred years of age (Fig. 21). This figure belonged to Marin Negro (d. after 1561), whose alleged surname, Negro, possibly was an allusive appellative identifying him as a *negromante* (necromancer). The archive research made by Sannan Nunziale in 1987 to find biographical information about a Marin belonging to the Negro family in sixteenth-century Venice, in fact, was totally unfruitful.\(^{28}\)

The meaning of the word *negromante* was made clear by Tomaso Garzoni in his *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (1515), whereby he associated magicians, sorcerers, and necromancers in general with tricksters, illusionists, and individuals

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\(^{27}\) Ferrigni (1884), 110-113.

practicing witchcraft. Such an association would be made more explicit by Ottonelli in his treatise as he noted that one of the enticing practices of the charlatans consisted in ‘destrezze di mano’ (sleight-of-hand tricks), which had been judged as ‘cosa del demonio e specie di Negromantia’ (a demonic thing, and a kind of necromancy) by someone having spiritual authority in a particular city, where he therefore denied the license to ‘salire in banco’ (perform on a raised stage) to those willing to engage in such an activity. In Renaissance Europe Ottonelli was not the only one to draw a parallel between the ability to make an inanimate object appear like a live being (with vocal and/or motion power) and the ability to evoke ghostly spirits to interact with them. In The Fall of the Magician by Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, published by Hieronymus Cock in 1565, a magus is overwhelmed by diabolical spirits and charlatans, including a puppeteer playing his hand puppet, which appears to be an animated creature rather than a human simulacrum.

Marin Negro’s last and only published comedy, La Pace, was first printed in Venice in 1561 and thereafter was reprinted eight times by seven different workshops until 1620. This suggests that the play enjoyed great success. Its prologue features a playwright who also is a necromancer, and evokes the ghostly spirit of a painter, ‘Gigio Arthemio from Rovigo’, whom the nigromante calls ombra (shadow). From the opening speech of the necromancer, performed in a kind of ‘theatre in the theatre’ scene, we can assume that La Pace was represented on a raised stage with an ephemeral presentation.

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30 Ottonelli, III, 440.
scenery like the one visible in Luca Carlevarijs’ *Puppeteers and Comedians in Piazza San Marco* (c. 1700), but built in the *campo ai Frari* (Fig. 102). Notably this square could accommodate a wide audience, whom Marin would praise though his autobiographical character:

> Avendo io sentito ragionare, che qui in Venetia sopra uon campo de frati Minori, hora si representa una comedia; essendo naturalmente tanto curioso, e desideroso di vedere cotali cose ch’io non credo ch’alcuno mi sia uguale, se non mi havessi fatto portar qui a tempo […] mi sarei da me mesdesimo disperato […]. Per certo non solamente la moltitudine di persone honorate mi dimostra a l’animo, che qui habbia da essere cosa molto bella, ma l’apparecchiato theatre, o scena come lo vogliamo dire, essendo fatto di così degno, & raro artificio, mi da bonissima ara di quello ch’io spero.

(I heard that here in Venice, in the square [before the church] of the Friars Minor, a comedy is going to be performed. Being extremely curious by nature, and thus willing to see the things done by others, although I believe that no one can be my equal, I would be desperate if […] I had not been taken here on time […]. For sure not only the numerous honourable people who have come here make me think that the show will be very good, but also the theatrical apparatus, or in other words the scene set, which arouses great expectations as it has been made with rare and acclaim-worthy artifice).³⁴

The use of scenic devices to amaze the audience with ‘artifice’ is suggested by other words pronounced by the necromancer:

> Quanto potere habbia l’arte della nigromantia se lo vedrà ogn’uno che qui si trova, che non solamente commandero, & sarò ubedito dal centro della terra, ma anchor tutti li pianeti del cielo faro mostrarmisi palesi.

³⁴ Negro (1561), 3r-5v.
(Everyone here will see the power of necromancy as not only I will command, and be obeyed by the [forces] at the centre of the Earth, but I will also make all the planets in the sky show up before my eyes). 35

We do not know whether the wondrous appearance of planets in the scene of the raised stage was obtained with mechanically controlled figures, motions, or a magic lantern.

The method suggested by Sebastiano Serlio, which means using painted cut-outs controlled by means of a wire and black threads to be pulled slowly from behind the scene without making noise, was a possibility. 36 Nonetheless, Marin Negro’s mention of gravity and planets in his play suggests that he was an attentive observer of the ongoing developments of his time, including those in astronomy and optics. He certainly knew about the rocket-propelled fantastic animals of the Venetian physician Giovanni Fontana (c. 1395-1455), who also considered himself a *magus*, and above all his proto-magic lantern. 37 That optic device, probably used for the construction of a kind of *cosmorama*, called *mondo novo*, also found application in stage design during the Renaissance. 38 Marin Negro’s eye on sixteenth-century Venice could not overlook the works by his contemporaries, particularly the plays written by Andrea Calmo and Antonio da Molino, whom he mentioned in the prologue of *La Pace*. 39

It should not surprise, therefore, that in *La Pace* Marin Negro envisaged dialogues between stock characters speaking different dialects and languages. The main roles include Sahanello, a Venetian merchant from Malamocco, and his son Eugenio; Eugenio’s servant, Scaltrino,

36 ‘Et se tal volta accadrà che uno pianeta, o altra cosa si vegga passare, sia ben dipinta questa cosa in cartone & tagliata intorno, poi dietro la scena (cioèi casamenti) sia tirato a traverse un filo di ferro sottile, & con alcuni anelleti in esso filo dietro il cartone, nel quale sia un filo negro, & da l’altro lato sarà una persona che pian piano lo tirerà, ma sarà sorte di lontano, che né l’uno né l’altro filo sia veduto’. S. Serlio, *Architettura. Libro II. De lumi artificiali delle scene* (F. Senese and Z. Krugher: Venice, 1566), II, 43.
38 On the *mondo novo* see Chapter VII. Examples of effects obtained with a magic lantern in operatic productions will be discussed in Chapter III.
39 Negro (1561), 4.
and his Bergamasque helper, Tabarin; a Bergamasque doctor; Ortica and Gelmina, two old women from Venice and Bergamo, respectively; a Spanish bravo (coarse soldier) named Tombola; Frangia the Greek, his wife Creusa, their daughter Doralice, and their servant from Friuli named Agnolo. The many characters and complex plot of \textit{La Pace} would suggest that Marin wrote it for actors, although it could be staged with puppets as well. In that case the allegorical figure of Peace could be a \textit{deus ex machina} ‘descending from the sky’, as written in the play. Besides, a shadow puppet would be perfect for the representation of the ghost evoked by the necromancer. Finally, iconic figures like Marin Negro’s \textit{Friar} hand puppet in Parma could give shape to the stock roles of this \textit{commedia veneta}, which anticipated the more famous masks of the \textit{commedia dell’arte}.\footnote{\textit{It should be noted that the term \textit{commedia dell’arte} is not coeval with the origin of this genre, which initially was simply called \textit{commedia}. See Katritzky (2006), ‘Introduction’}. An example of these stock characters is the Venetian \textit{zanni} rod puppet dating to the second half of the seventeenth century in the Davia Bargellini Museum, Bologna (Fig. 22). This figure, which has counterweighted lead soles on its feet, wooden head with a big-nose mask, large hands, and a costume made of a coarse fabric, is very different from the refined marionettes with precious costumes that were in use the noble palaces of Venice in the eighteenth century. Its characteristics allow us to classify it as a ‘popular’ puppet as opposed to the aforementioned ‘aristocratic’ puppets if we conform to Magnin’s audience based taxonomy.

One of these aristocratic puppets, the \textit{Harlequin} in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, is particularly interesting from an iconographic point of view because it epitomises the notion of the \textit{zanni} as Bergamasque peasants who left their native town to seek work in Venice as servants and porters after the annexation of Bergamo to the Republic in 1428. This historical fact is recounted by Garzoni in \textit{La piazza universale di tutte le}
professioni del mondo, first published in Venice in 1515. The masked Harlequin puppet in Venice is dressed with a Venetian jacket identifying the character as a manservant, and the light-ground outfit of the zanni, on which the unmistakable coloured patches have been applied (Fig. 63). In puppetry, as in performances with live actors, Harlequin is often interacting with his companion Brighella, usually wearing a white costume with green buttons. Whilst Harlequin speaks with the accent of the hilltop town of Bergamo (città alta), Brighella speaks with the accent of the lower urban centre (città bassa) of that city. Their master is Pantalone, the Venetian wealthy merchant par excellence. His traditional costume consisted of a tight-fitting red vest, red breeches and stockings, black slippers and a long black-sleeved coat called zimarra. An example is the Pantalone marionette displayed in Venice, Ca’ Goldoni Museum (Fig. 64), dating between the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century.

In her comprehensive study of the commedia dell’arte, Katritzky investigated the iconography of the principal stock roles focusing on the costumes of live performers. In including images of stock character puppets, this dissertation perhaps offers a little addition to her thorough work. It also adds to other studies on this genre, some of which include short sections on puppet theatre. Puppets representing the zanni, Pantalone, the lovers, the captain, the doctor, the male servants and maidens such as Columbine can be seen in all three major collections of Venetian marionettes in Venice, London, and Bologna. For historical rigour, with the exception of the aforementioned Harlequin and

42 Coeval and comparable Pantalone marionettes dressed with the traditional outfit are also preserved in the Davia Bargellini Museum, Bologna, and Musées Gadagne, Lyon.
Pantalone, the costumes and characteristics of these string puppets have been discussed in Chapters IV and V as they date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during which the *commedie* with the stock characters of the Renaissance were still represented with puppets.

No Venetian *scenarii* (plots and stage directions) for puppet plays predating the nineteenth century are known. According to the musicologist Roberto Leydi, adaptations of different religious plays were made across Italy from of the Renaissance, often introducing characters of the *commedia dell’arte*. The repertory outlined by Leydi includes *Giuda iscariota* (*Judas Iscariot*) by Francesco Lottini (1512-1572); *Giuseppe l’Ebreo* (*Joseph the Jew*) by Ortenzio Scamacca (1562-1648); *Maddalena lasciva e penitente* (*The Lascivious and Penitent Magdalene*) and *Vita e Morte di San Bartolomeo* (*The Life and Death of Saint Bartholomew*) by Gian Battista Andreini (1578-1654); and *Il figliol prodigo* (*The Prodigal Son*), *L’acquisto di Giacobbe* (*Jacob’s Purchase*), and *Il battesimo di Cristo* (*The Baptism of Christ*) by Abbot Ringhieri (1721-1787).45 Even in the largest puppet museum collections of Italy, however, scripts for puppet plays – if preserved – date from around the nineteenth century. Based on visual evidence, for example the puppets in Figs. 21 and 22, and the fact that playwrights such as Andrea Calmo and Negro Marin also were puppet players, it is reasonable to think that adaptations, variants, or stories with characters of the *commedia* were represented with puppets in the Veneto since the late sixteenth century, but neither documents nor chronicles support this assumption.

45 R. Leydi, ‘Spettacoli classici e popolari a Venezia’, in R. Leydi and R. Mezzanotte, *Burattini e Marionette. Testi del repertorio classico italiano del Teatro delle marionette e dei burattini con introduzione informazioni e note* (Gallo Grande: Milan, 1958), 65-68. The scripts or scenary of these adaptations, however, are neither dated nor nor referenced. The same applies to the ‘popular representations’ listed in this essay, including *Santa Margherita da Cortina, Santa Tecla, San Rocco, Il martirio di San Vittore, La morte di Giacomo Apostolo, Santa Filomena, Il viaggio dei Re Magi, and Santa Rosa.*
Flaminio Scala’s scenarii (plots with stage directions) of the commedia dell’arte, fifty in total (most of which feature Pantalone), were first published in Venice in 1611. More examples from other troupes survive in different European collections and have recently been published in a critical edition by Anna Maria Testaverde. Last but not least, fifty-one scenarii whose dating is still open to question, although generally ascribed to the seventeenth century, are preserved in the Museo Civico Correr, Venice. All these scenarii were undoubtedly written for live actors: the lists of robbe (things) required for their staging often includes costumes, lamps, and sticks for beating, but no objects associable to puppets. An exception is L’Alvida, from Flaminio Scala’s collection, in that ‘a lion, a lioness, a she-bear, and a donkey’ are listed amongst the characters of this ‘royal drama’. These animals perhaps were meant to be body puppets, but could also be masks.

Other written sources of the sixteenth century, which will be discussed in more detail later, testify to the presence of puppeteers in Venice by that time, but without offering clues that may allow us to associate the figures in question to the characters of the commedia dell’arte. Visual evidence of puppeteers performing in booths placed next to the raised stages of the comedians, can be found in the depiction of Piazza San Marco at Carnival Time by Joseph Heintz the Younger (1600-1678) in Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj (Fig. 20). Aside from revealing that cross-fertilisation was possible between puppetry and commedia in the sixteenth century, this painting offers a wonderful insight into Renaissance Venice and its theatrical life at a time in which San Marco was not yet paved. This was a time in which the Venetian Government repeatedly banished and permitted again the staging of ‘comediae et repraesentationes comediarum’, which the

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48 Venice, Museo Civico Correr, IT X 137, 138 and 139 corresponding to MS 6568, 6569, and 6570, respectively. Published in Alberti (2000).
Council of Ten had prohibited by law on 29 December 1508 if unauthorised. This decree was never abrogated, and yet the resolutions passed on 25 September 1581, on 17 December 1582 and 2 May 1600 reveal that all efforts to enforce it were in vain. Indeed, the Venetians’ passion for spectacle had gained momentum since the compagine della calza had prompted the revival of theatre, its performances, and its figures.

Ephemeral Theatres on the Ground and on Water

Of the ephemeral theatres commissioned by the compagine della calza, including the one designed by Palladio for the Accesi and another one made by Vasari for the Sempiterni, nothing remains. Instead, a famous drawing of the macchina del mondo or teatro del mondo designed by G. A. Rusconi 1564 for the compagnia degli Accesi is preserved in the Museo Civico Correr. Floating theatres of this kind gave shape to the famous metaphor of the Renaissance (all the world is a stage) and offered a vision of Venice as a microcosm. Perhaps the more famous of these images is the engraving from a series produced by Giacomo Franco in 1597 for the coronation of Dogaressa Morosina Morosini Grimani, which shows the teatro del mondo designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi (Fig. 24). Drawn by two large sea horses under the guidance of Neptune, this floating theatre became the performance space for a tableau vivant with the allegorical figures of Justice, Religion, Faith, and Prudence, virtually sharing the scene with the god.

50 Venice, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio di Dieci, Comuni, reg. 32, c. 55v, Resolution of 29 December 1508.
51 Venice, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio di Dieci, Comuni, filza 247, Resolution of 25 September 1581 (annulled on 17 December 1582, see Consiglio di Dieci, Comuni, reg. 36, cc. 178v-179r); and Consiglio di Dieci, Comuni, reg. 50, c. 19v.
of the Adriatic and its fabulous aquatic creatures.\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, this wonderful \textit{theatrum mundi} represented the apex the development of theatre architecture and stage design in the end of a century that had started with the revival of automata initiated by the Humanists.

Such a revival led to the ennoblement of string or rod puppets, which were associated to automata as their construction also required ingeniousness. Both these types of mechanised figure were regarded as the offspring of human inventiveness, which mirrored the power of creation, as we may read in Pseudo-Aristotle’s \textit{De Mundo}, published in Venice in 1521:

\begin{quote}
It is most characteristic of the divine to be able to accomplish diverse kinds of work with ease and by simple movement, as masters of the past did: by one turn of a handle they could make a machine accomplish many different operations. Similarly, by pulling a single string, puppet-showmen make the neck and hand and shoulder and eye and sometimes all parts of a figure move with a certain harmony [...].\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Later is the praiseworthy description of a kind of string puppet provided by Hieronymus Cardanus in his \textit{De Rerum Varietate} as follows:

\begin{quote}
Mira sunt, quae de duabus statuis ligneis parvis, et colludentibus, a duobus Siculis fieri vidi: erant autem unico filo transfixae hic inde, quae annexae altera quidem parte lignae statuesque fixa manebat, reliqua tibiae, quam ille pulsabat, extensor utrinque filo: nullum saltationis genus non aembulabantur, gesticulantes miris modis, capite, cruribus, pedibus, brachiis totque in varias formas, ut ingénue fatear me tanti artificiosi rationem non assequi: neque enim plura fila, neque modo extensa, modo remissa, sed unicum filum in singulis statuis, et simper intentum: nam multas alias vidi quae pluribus filis,\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}

\end{footnotes}
According to Purshke, the puppets described by Cardanus as figurines hung on one or two strings stretched horizontally over a tablet were similar to the jigging puppets that were brought to Europe from the East by the French and German knights returning from the second crusade. The earliest representation of these puppets is a famous miniature dating around 1175-1185 and now lost, from the *Hortus deliciarum* by Herrade von Landsberg, who had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by that time. Jigging puppets of this kind, called *marionnettes a la planchette* in France, would be used by European wandering performers for centuries. In Venice, visual evidence testifies to their existence until the eighteenth century (see Fig. 101).

During the Renaissance string puppets were not the only figures to be manipulated by street players in the sixteenth century. In his *Historia de los títeres en España* Varey argued that the *mondo novo*, a kind of cabinet theatre with figures or images inside, which revolved when the player turned a handle controlling the wheel

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57 Cardanus, H. *De Rerum Varietate* (Lyon, 1580), Liber XIII - De artificiis humilioribus, ‘Experimenta Minima’.
mechanism driving their movement, was an Italian invention dating to the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{60} It appears that these cabinets showed images of the ‘new world’ that could either be pictures or projections, whose motion was mechanically controlled. In Venice, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VII, their presence is recorded in visual sources starting from the first decade of the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the earliest description of wheel mechanisms like those mentioned by Varey can be seen in Bernardino Baldi’s translation of Heron of Alexandria’s \textit{Automata}, published in Venice in 1589, with illustrations of the \textit{machine se moventi} (Fig. 23).\textsuperscript{61} By that time Alessandro Piccolomini had already translated Aristotle’s \textit{Mechanical Problems}, published in 1582. In his notes to the translation he observed that certain devices, which the Greeks called \textit{automata}, were shown in different cities by ‘charlatans, street entertainers, imposters, and other infamous and mercenary people’ who earned their living ‘stupefying the \textit{vulgus}’.\textsuperscript{62}

The status of street performers had not changed much since Tomaso Garzoni had published his discourse on ‘spectacle performers in general, and charlatans or crowd gatherers’ in \textit{La Piazza Universale di tutte le professioni del mondo}, published in Venice in 1515:

\begin{quote}

Fu di questa professione qualche memoria ancor a presso a gli antichi;

essendo che i bagatelliere latinamente detti Gesticulatores, & secondo i Greci Chiromoni, ottennero qualche nome fra loro, dando piacere con le bagatelle, e frascheria sino a quell tempo, ch’era di molto maggior semplicità che hora colmo & ripieno […]. Ma a tempi nostril il numero, & le specie di costoro son cresciute a guise della mal’herba in modo, che per
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Varey (1957), 10. Cited in Jurkowski (1996), I, 73.
\textsuperscript{61} Erone Alessandrino, \textit{De gli Automati overo Machine se moventi}. Translated by Bernardino Baldi (G. Pozzo: Venice, 1589), 39.
ogni città, per ogni terra, per ogni piazza, non si vede altro che ceretani, o cantimbanchi, che più presto magiaguadgni puon dimandarsi che altramente. E tutti con varie arti & inganni illudono le menti del popolazzo, & allettano l’orecchia a sentir le frotole raccontate da loro, gli occhi a veder le bagatelle, i sensi tutti a stare attenti alle prove ridicolose che in piazza fanno.

(Memories of this profession go back to the antiquity as amongst the jugglers, called *gesticulatores* by the Latins and *cheirons* by the Greeks, some became known for entertaining with *bagatelle* and froths at that time, when there were not so many of them […]. These days, however, the number and kinds of these people have grown like bad grass so that in every city, every land, and every square we see nothing else but charlatans or storytellers, who make their living only worming income out of others. And they all do so using different skills and swindles, with which they deceive the minds of the less discerning people, pleasing their ears with lies, their eyes with tricks, and all the senses with the funny performances that they make in the streets).63

Garzoni differentiated between these charlatans and the ‘jumpers, dancers, and all sorts of acrobats, and runners’, the ‘comic and tragic actors and narrators, or histrions’ and the ‘buffoons and mimes, or histrions’.64 To some extent he thus conformed with the classification of entertainers acknowledged by Alfonso X of Castille in 1273, according to which court artist included *juglares* (minstrels) and *trovadores* (troubadours), whilst street players divided into *istriones* (mimes), *inventores* (storytellers), *bufones* (buffoons, also

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63 Garzoni (1515), ‘De’ formatori di spettacoli in genere, & de’ Ceretani, o Ciumatori massime. Discorso CV’., 548-553.
performing at court), and *cuzuros*, the most ‘vile class’ as composed by persons could neither act nor sing, but train animals and play puppets.\(^6\)

At the turn of the century puppeteers still performed in the streets, and were still considered as belonging to the heterogeneous, blameful category of charlatans. One of the most precious sources shedding light on their activities is the treatise *Della Christiana moderatione del theatro* by Gian Domenico Ottonelli (1584-1670). In his fourth admonition to the actors the Jesuit prelate stated that

Il ciarlatano si guardi non peccare con l’invenzioni, che usa per allettar il popolo all’udienza, e trattenerlo con diletto […] A questo fine alcuni compariscono sopra un banco, e si mostrano dentro un finto castello di tela, gioculatori con vari fantocci, detti Burattini, cioè figurine, alle quali fanno far gesti, e dir parole di molta efficacia, per eccitar diletto, e riso negli spettatore: il che, quando segua senza oscenità, rimane tra’t ermini d’un curioso, e piacevole, tuttoche vano trattenimento popolare, e plebeo: ma quando vi s’odono parole brutte o si veggono fatti disonesto, come purtroppo avviene spesse volte, all’hora i buratti del castello servono a’ diavoli dell’Inferno per rovinar molte anime, con grave offesa del Creatore; & il giocolatore, e ciarlatano è un vituperoso, & infame ministro della dishonestà, e un mezzano dell’eterna dannazione.

(The charlatan should not sin with the inventions that he uses to attract audiences, whom he would entertain […]. To such purpose some charlatans step up on a bench and draw attention to a fictive castle made of cloth with jugglers inside, who have various puppets, called *burattini* or figurines, which they manipulate so that they appear to move, and speak funny words to delight the audience and make them laugh. When all this is done without obscenity, it is a curious, pleasant, and innocuous entertainment, although vain, popular, and plebeian. But when bad words or dishonest actions are

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performed, as it often happens, then the puppets of the castle are useful to
the devils from hell to ruin many souls, with great offence to our Creator.
And the juggler and charlatan is a vicious and infamous minister of
dishonesty, a medium of eternal damnation).66

In Venice this way of seeing would remain essentially unchanged until the end of the
eighteenth century, regardless of the fact that puppeteers played an active role in the
theatrical developments of their day. Street performers were probably hired as
manipulators to move the increasingly complex scenic devices that were staged in
private and public performance spaces.

From the last decades of the sixteenth century attempts to stage performances
reviving classical antiquity, and yet mirroring the ongoing artistic developments of the
late Renaissance were made in the Accademie. Famous was the Accademia Olimpica in
Vicenza, who commissioned Andrea Palladio to design the first permanent theatre in the
Veneto, and others played an equally important role in Padua and Venice.67 As will be
discussed in the next chapter, the use of dramatic figures was also experimented in
different ways, and such an undertaking contributed to the development of the operatic
productions of the Baroque era.

66 Ottonelli (1652), 435-436.
67 M. Battaglia, Delle Accademie Veneziane (Venice: 1826).
CHAPTER III

Theatrical Feasts and Figures: from the Catajo Palace to Villa Contarini

During the sixteenth century the renewed interest in theatre architecture initiated by the Humanists underpinned the rediscovery of stage machinery, automata, and string puppets as discussed in Chapter II. Following this revival, scenic devices were further developed to create wondrous effects in representations that conjoined painting, sculpture, music, dance, tournament, and featured different kinds of figures interacting with live performers. In this chapter, light will be shed on the spectacles reminiscent of court entertainments that were held during the seventeenth century in Venice’s mainland, more particularly in two different settings on the outskirts of Padua. One is the Catajo Palace at Battaglia Terme, under the patronage of Pio Enea degli Obizzi II (1592-1674). The other is Villa Contarini at Piazzola sul Brenta, under the patronage of Marco Contarini (1632-1689).

In spite of a forty-year difference in age, these two patrons had much in common: Pio Enea degli Obizzi II was an inspiration to Marco Contarini, and both played a major role within a transitional phase in the theatre history of the Serenissima, a phase that led to the debut of opera in Venice and the opening of several public theatres in this context during the seventeenth century.¹ By twist of fate, the profit-aimed operatic productions run by the entrepreneurial nobility who managed these theatres would draw to an end the more exclusive spectacles that preceded them or ran parallel for some time in private spheres connected with the system of courts.²

¹ Four public theatres existed in Venice by 1629, and further twelve were built before the end of the seventeenth century. See Mangini (1974), 29-32. See also the introduction in L. N. Galvani, I teatri musicali di Venezia nel secolo XVII, 1637-1700 (Milan, 1879).
The collections of artworks, musical instruments, and weapons built by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi and Marco Contarini reveal shared interests in music and the arts, and also a desire to preserve the memory of the military deeds with which their respective noble families acquired wealth and prestige. Although very different from one another, the Catajo palace at Battaglia Terme and Villa Contarini at Piazzola sul Brenta have architectural elements in common as the renovation works and additions made to these residences during the seventeenth century turned them into spaces of performance meeting the taste and desires of their patrons. For the purpose of this research attention is drawn to the spectacles with figures that were patronised by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi and Marco Contarini, respectively, above all in the aforementioned estates. The aesthetic principles of these shows will be examined based on the relevant festival books, libretti, and descriptive accounts with commentaries about their reception. Finally, comparisons will be made to bring to the fore similarities and differences between the spectacles examined.

Before focusing on these two outstanding examples of theatrical life in the Most Serene Republic, it is worth examining a performance that preceded them, and represents a trait-d’union between the legacy of Renaissance architects and the illusionistic expedients devised by the stage designers of the Baroque.

**Il Solimano, 1634**

During carnival 1634, Prospero Bonarelli’s *Il Solimano* premiered in Venice at an ephemeral theatre built in the parish of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Dedicated to Cosimo II de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, this tragedy had been staged in Florence in 1573. On that occasion the costumes of the Turks had been designed based on Sansovino’s

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descriptions in his *Historia universale dell’origine, et imperio de’ Turchi.* The full figure of Suleyman wearing a feathered turban and a mantle can be seen in the Florentine libretto, but not in the Venetian one (Fig. 72)

Sansovino’s book possibly also served as a model for the representation in Venice, where an anonymous booklet recounting the coronation of Suleyman and describing the celebrations that were held on that occasion had been published in 1589. These and other sources about the Ottoman contributed to spread a knowledge of the Serenissima’s long-time enemy, and yet principal partner in trade. Since the fifteenth century the commercial and diplomatic relations between these two rivals fighting for the control of the Mediterranean had entailed cultural exchange. Titian and his workshop had painted different portraits of this Suleyman, all with a certain degree of uniformity, perhaps made after a print or medal with his effigy. In *King Francis I and Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent* (1539), attributed to Titian and now at the Kunsthistoriches Museum in Vienna, Suleyman is depicted as a tall, relatively thin man with long neck, turbaned head, and moustache. From Sanuto’s *Diarii* we know that Durer’s prints after his *Portrait of Suleyman the Magnificent* (1526), now at the Musée Bonnat in Bayonne, also circulated in Venice. The figure of Suleyman shown in Bonarelli’s libretto printed in Florence, however, reproduces the likeness of the portraits by Titian and his workshop. In 1634 the audience attending the performance of Bonarelli’s *Il Solimano* in Venice would expect to see a protagonist with the likeness and costumes depicted in the Florentine libretto, based on the depictions and accounts by Venetian authors.

In Venice Bonarelli’s *Il Solimano* was performed by amateur actors and musicians who were members of the Accademia degli Immobili. One of them, the

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7 *L’in coronazione del Sultan Suleyman e le feste che si fecero* (Venice, 1589).
unidentified ‘Costante Accademico Immobile’, provided a description of the scenery noting that it was designed by the Venetian painter and sculptor Tasio Gioancarli after Palladio’s perspective scene in the Teatro Olimpico. From this account we also know that during the intermezzi, while arie by the Venetian composer Natale Monferrato (1603-1685) were sung, two-dimensional figures sliding on rails moved across the stage ‘in the distance’ without breaking the illusion of the perspective scene.10

Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554) was the first theatre architect to suggest the use of two-dimensional figurette during the intermedii of plays or tragedies. In his second Book on Architecture he described such a scenic device as follows:

Mentre la scena è vota di dicitori, potrà l’architetto aver preparato alcune ordinanze di figurette: di quella grandezza che se ricercarà dove haveranno a passare; e queste saranno di grosso cartone colorite & tagliate intorno, le quali posaranno sopra un regolo di legno a tra verso la scena, dove sia qualche arco fatto sopra il suolo uno incastro a coda di rondina, entro lo quale così pianamente una persona dietro al detto arco si farà passare, & tal fiata dimostrare che canti & voci, onde dietro la scena farà una musica a sommissa voce. Tal volta frarà correre un squadrone di gente chi a piedi & ch a cavallo, le quali con alcune voci o gridi sordidi, strepiti di tamburi, & suono di trombe, pascono molto gli spettatori.

(When there are no speaking characters on stage, the architect may envisage some figures performing actions. Their size should be proportioned to the scene set in which they have to move. These figures could be made of thick pasteboard, painted and cut out, and could slide along the stage by means of a batten whose end starts from where there are a few arches. It would thus be necessary to make in the floor a depression in the shape of a swallow’s tail that would then house the batten, which someone could push from behind the arch; this way it would be possible to make the sliding figures look like [live] singers or musicians playing instruments while

10 Costante Accademico Immobile, Apparato con il quale è stato rappresentato in Vinegia, l’anno 1634, alli 8 di marzo, il Solimano, tragedia dell’illustrissimo signor conte Prospero Bonarelli (Venice, 1634).
the sound of charming melodies comes from behind the scene. The architect may eventually show a group of human-like figures walking or riding horses while voices or shouts, drum beats and the sound of trumpets come from behind the scene: the spectators very much like this kind of thing).\(^{11}\)

Serlio’s cut-outs were not a novelty: they had been used for the first time in Florence in 1586 as part of the apparatus designed by Buontalenti for *L’amico fido* by Giovanni de’ Bardi.\(^{12}\) It appears, however, that figures of this kind were unseen in Venice some fifty years later as the Costante Accademico Immobile provided an accurate description of their features and reception as follows:

> Stimerei erave mio mancamento quando non facessi alcuna mentione di quanto si operò tra un atto, e ‘altro, mentre canto la musica, & che la scena era vuota, con le parole, che fuono cantate, poiché all’hora nelle parti più lontane della scena si vedeva con gentil modo camminare genti di molta quantità, & di qualità diverse perc’hora apparve una compagnia di cavalleria; hora una squadra di fanteria. Tal’hor cariaggi, & alcuna volta cameli carichi, ed in soma molte altre capricciose varietà, quali tutte erano figurine in cartoni mirabilmente dipinte, & intagliate, che movendosi per quelle strade, havevano in tutte le sue parti del naturale, che con molta maraviglia, e stupore, erano senza batter occhio riguardate, & con sommo applauso lodate, & commentate, facendo con l’apparir suo restar stupidi, attoniti, ed ammirati li riguardanti, quali con molta vaghezza in un tempo medesimo ricreavano l’occhio, & le orecchie.

I think I would be at fault if I omitted to mention what happened between one act and the other while the music was sung and the scene was empty. Words were sung even when no one was on stage because at some point a group of knights showed up, then came an infantry groups, and then chariots followed by

\(^{11}\) S. Serlio (1566), II, 43.

\(^{12}\) B. De Rossi, _Descrizione del magnificentissimo apparato e de’ meravigliosi Intermedi fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze nelle felicissime Nozze degli Illustriissimi ed Eccellentissimi Signor Don Cesare D’Este e la Signora Donna Virginia Medici_ (Giorgio Marscotti: Florence, 1585), 5r-5v.
camels with loads, and many other extravagant characters, all of which were cardboard figures, finely painted and cut out. Moving along their path, these figures looked so natural in every part of it that they stirred wonder and amazement, and captured the viewer’s attention. As a result, they were greatly applauded and admired. Their appearance impressed the audience, who were astonished and surprised because such figures pleased the spectators’ eyes and ears at the same time.  

To arouse amazement, these cut-outs should have been perceived like something different from the usual figures that had been played in the streets of Venice since earlier times. An observation by Jurkowski, expressed in an essay on contemporary puppet theatre, provides a clue to understanding what made Serlio’s cut-outs appear so different to the Venetians:

Puppet theatre is a theatrical art distinguished from the theatre of live performers by its most fundamental feature, namely that the speaking, acting subject makes temporal use of vocal and motor sources of power which are outside it, which are not its own attributes. The relationships between the subject and its power sources are constantly changing, and this variation has essential semiological and aesthetic significance.  

In this perspective, it is the unprecedented combination of vocal and motion power given to the figures that might have stirred the audience’s reaction described earlier, something that in Venice was evidently unseen before 1634. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that in 1652 Gian Domenico Ottonelli described figures sliding on rails as a newly-developed system for staging representations with two-dimensional figures (commedianti figurati).

13 Apparato con il quale è stato rappresentato in Venegia l'anno 1634 alli 8 marzo dall'Academia de gli Immobili Il Solimano tragedia dell'illustissimo signor conte Prospero Bonarelli. Descritto dal Costante Academico Immobile (Venice, 1634), 21-22.
The latter used to be speechless figures, but in ‘modern’ practice they were given vocal power by singers who remained hidden behind the scene:

E mi si aggiunge quel pratico, che v’era un’altra sorte di commedianti, i quali per rimostranza dell’eccellente loro ingegno hanno inventato un altro nuovo modo di far rappresentationi theatrali con meravigliose macchine, e figure, muovendosi tutte per arte, e per forza d’occulti contrappesi. Ecco la pratica. Formano il palco alto all’uso dell’ordinarie commedie, e la scena della solita grandezza, e poi sopra il palco formano alcuni legni cavati in forma di canali, e che servono come di strade, dentro cui appariscono le figure, alte un mezzo braccio, fatte di cartone, rappresentanti varie forme, e si muovono dal principio del canale verso il mezzo del palco e verso il fine, per via di stottoposti, e nascostì contrappesi, alcuni de’ quali pendono da un filo attaccato con una bullettino su la spalla di ciascuna figura, e serve per maneggiarla, & addestrarla in vari e gratiosi atteggiamenti. Questi comici rappresentano opere sacre e cantate; e di loro alcuni stanno nascosti sotto il palco, o in altro luogo occulto, & opportuno, per muovere i contrappesi conforme al bisogno […] E di questo modo l’ingegnoso inventore è stato un moderno pittore e macchinista Bartolomeo Neri, il quale, secondo l’eccellenza del suo valore, inventò per rendere più dilettevoli & ammirabili queste publiche e theatrali attioni molte sorti di macchine belle a meraviglia, facendo che esse pure, come le figure, per via di contrappessi si muovano, e scendano dalle parti più alte della scena alle inferiori, secondo richiede la qualità e necessità de’ casi, & accidenti rappresentati.

(That expert [Andrea Setti] also told me that there is another kind of players, whose excellent ingeniousness enabled them to invent a new way of making theatrical representations with wondrous machines and figures, which they artfully move by means of hidden counterweights. On a raised stage of the size that is customary for the scene of comedy, there are wooden channels. Cardboard figures of various shapes, measuring half a braccio in height, move from the start of these channels towards the centre of the stage, and from there to other end by means of hidden counterweights. Some of these are attached to the shoulder of the figure, so
that the latter can be handled and arranged in graceful postures. The performers using this kind of figures represent sacred plays with sung music; some of them keep hidden below the stage or elsewhere so that they can move the counterweights and sing or play musical instruments without being seen […]. The inventor of this ingenious system is the painter and stage designer Bartolomeo Neri. His skills enabled him to invent many other wondrous scenic machines, also controlled by means of counterweights, which could be moved from higher to lower parts of the scene as needed to represent actions and episodes of all sorts.\footnote{Ottonelli (1652), III, 464-465.}

Aside from Serlio’s figures, the staging of \textit{Il Solimano} in Venice envisaged the use of the \textit{machina delle nuvole}, a mechanically controlled cloud that descended from the ceiling carrying the \textit{soprano} singer Felicita Romano, who impersonated the moon in the sung prologue. This element, which was absent in the earlier Florentine version of the show, added spectacularity to the performance mirroring the ongoing developments of opera as well as a change in taste.

Two years later, in Padua, Felicita Romano would be the protagonist of \textit{L’Ermiona}, the most famous \textit{festa teatrale} invented by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi, which will be discussed in more detail below.

\textbf{The ‘Inventions’ of Marquis Pio Enea degli Obizzi II}

The reception of Serlio’s cut-outs used for the staging of \textit{Il Solimano} in Venice reveals that Venice was perhaps less permeable to innovations originating from court entertainment compared to other cities, Padua for instance, whose geographical position and connections with the House of Este had always made it an outstanding centre of theatrical activity. Since the city’s annexation to the Republic in 1405, Paduan playwrights and performers such as Andrea Calmo (1510-1571) or Zuan Pollo, both of whom were also puppet
players, had enriched theatrical life in Venice. In the first half of the seventeenth century
another creative personality from Padua, the Pio Enea Obizzi II (1592-1674), gave a new
breath of life to theatre, performance, and spectacle in the Most Serene Republic.

Pio Enea II degli Obizzi, Marquis of Orciano, belonged to a family of mercenaries
whose origins were rooted in Burgundy, although his ancestor Antonio degli Obizzi had
settled in Padua in the early-fifteenth century departing from the family branch at the
court of the Estensi in Ferrara. His grandfather, Pio Enea I degli Obizzi (1525-1589),
was awarded the title of Collaterale del Dominio Veneto as he had fought for the
Venetian Republic against the Ottoman Empire in the battle of Lepanto (1571). In the
1570s this war veteran undertook the project of building the Catajo grand palace at
Battaglia Terme on the foundations of a pre-existing castle.\(^{16}\) The decoration of this
palace clearly aimed at celebrating the glorious lineage of a family who were eager to
acquire political prestige by boasting a history of military deeds. In this manner the
frescos painted by Giovanni Battista Zelotti (c. 1526-1578) on the inner and outer
walls of this unusual palace depicted above all ‘wars and victories of our times against
infidels, and between Christians’.\(^{17}\)

Born on 4 August 1592 in the palace built by his wealthy grandfather, Pio Enea
II degli Obizzi fought for the Venetian Republic in the war of Gradisca (1614). Rather
than a man at arms, however, he was a poet and playwright who defined himself as an
‘inventor’ of theatrical feasts. In 1648 he undertook the project of further enriching the
Catajo palace with a small teatro in villa, which he built on the foundations of the stalls.\(^{18}\)
Over the course of a decade he also completed an architectural addition destined to

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\(^{16}\) G. Betussi, *Ragionamento sopra il Chataio luogo dello illustre Sig. Pio Enea Obizzi* (Padua, 1573), VIII-IX.
\(^{17}\) P. L. Fantelli, ‘Il Cataio’, in *Il Castello del Catajo e I suoi giardini* (La Galiverna: Battaglia Terme,
2000), 4. See also, I. B. Jaffe, *Zelotti’s Epic Frescoes at Catajo: The Obizzi Saga* (Fordham University
\(^{18}\) In the eighteenth century this theatre still existed as it is described in C. de Brosses, *Lettres familières
house tournaments and naval battle re-enactments (*naumachiae*). The performance space for this was the floodable courtyard known as the *cortile dei giganti*, because its walls were frescoed with giants within niches. These frescoes are lost, but the courtyard is extant (Fig. 30). With its rectangular plan and hydraulic system drawing water from the nearby watercourse, the courtyard of the Catajo palace was probably designed taking as a model Palazzo Pitti’s courtyard in Florence (Fig. 31). The latter was flooded on 11 May 1589 to stage a *naumachia* as part of the celebrations held for the marriage of Ferdinando de’ Medici and Christine of Lorraine, and other naval battle re-enactments were staged thereafter in this setting. Pio Enea II degli Obizzi had seen it while he was engaged in the set-up of entertainments at the court of Cosimo II de’ Medici between 1613 and 1615.

In the following years, from 1615 to 1619, he was ambassador to Alfonso III d’Este, Duke of Modena, at the court of Victor Amadeus I, Duke of Savoy, in Turin. We do not know if he was involved in the preparation of the *naumachia* on the Mont Cenis that was enacted in 1619 as part of the celebrations for the marriage between the Duke of Savoy and Marie Christine of Bourbon, sister of Louis X of France, as any possible contribution of his is not acknowledged in the festival book. Certain instead is the role that he played in the realisation of a spectacular joust with scenic apparatus by Alfonso Rivarolo, known as ‘il Chenda’ (1607-1640), which was commissioned by Alfonso d’Este to honour Cardinal Maurice of Savoy in Modena, in 1635.

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19 See G. Berni, *Descrizione del Cataio, luogo del marchese Pio Enea degli Obizzi* (Ferrara, 1669).
One year later the most famous outcome of Pio Enea II degli Obizzi’s inventiveness, *L’Ermiona*, was staged in Padua, at Prato della Valle, in an ephemeral theatre with five rows of boxes.\(^{23}\) This performance turned into reality a form of spectacle that had been conceived many years earlier, as in a letter that Pio Enea II degli Obizzi wrote to Alfonso d’Este in 1617 he explained his idea of ‘a non-ordinary festival envisaging different forms of acting with music, dance, and tournament’.\(^{24}\)

*L’Ermiona* unfolded into three mythological episodes, the abduction of Europe, the adventures of her brother Cadmus, and the marriage between Cadmus and Venus’ daughter Hermione. Each of these episodes envisaged a dramatised *cantata* for solo voice, followed by spectacular chivalric fights and balls. The scenic apparatus, designed by Alfonso Rivarolo, included ‘animated’ figures that were moved on the stage by means of a *machina* composed of a fixed mechanism with a mount, onto which interchangeable parts could be fitted. In the last episode ‘Gli Imenei’ (scene V), scenic figures played a major role. As we can read in the sumptuous festival book illustrated with engravings, ‘Jupiter riding an eagle, surrounded by bright clouds’ appeared from the ceiling. And then Hercules came, riding a ‘greenish many-headed Hydra, which was suspended in the sky by means of a wire hooked to its twisted tail’.\(^{25}\) These mechanically controlled figures are shown in one of the engravings in the festival book, which also reproduces the perspective scene in which they were set (Fig. 27).

The ‘animated’ figure of the Hydra staged in *L’Ermiona* reproduced the likeness of a seven-headed beast whose iconography was well-known in Padua as Giusto de’


Menabuoi had painted it in his cycle of frescoes with scenes from the *Book of Revelation* in the apse of the baptistery of the Padua cathedral (Fig. 25). The three-dimensional, movable Hydra that they saw, therefore, would stir imagination while reviving collective memory. From the account provided in the festival book of *L’Ermiona* we know that the three-dimensional figure of the Hydra impressed the audience ‘because its system of motion was not disclosed, and also because it could execute three different movements in the air: circular, to turn around Jupiter; swirling; and vertical, to disappear’ in a vortex. A parallel could be drawn between this mechanical Hydra and the slightly later Hydra puppet in the marionette theatre at the Borromeo Palace as both figures share – in principle – a system of motion to be controlled by means of strings and wires (Fig. 26).

In *L’Ermiona* some scenic figures were given vocal power too, as was the case of the five amorini singing and moving on as many clouds that were blown with the wind while taking a knight on horseback onto the stage (Fig. 28). In the second episode, ‘Gli errori di Cadmo’, Mercury flew into the scene ‘without showing the device that sustained him’ (Fig. 29). Then, another mechanically-controlled figure interacted with the live performer playing the role of Cadmus. It was a dragon ‘with yellow and black scales, hard gristle wings with red and dark brown spots, and a gnarled, twisted tail’. The hero ultimately killed the dragon, pulled its teeth and sowed them into the ground which, at the sound of horns, suddenly started moving ‘as if the soil were alive or kept something animated inside [...] until feathered helmets slowly started to come out of the ground, arousing amazement’ as these were the helmets of the knights that would have

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28 Ibid., 15.
29 Ibid., 50.
taken part in a tournament with *machine a cavallo* (mechanised figures on horseback).\textsuperscript{30} The engravings illustrating the festival book of *L’Ermiona* are very interesting because they show the interaction between live performers and animated figures. They also reveal how music and drama could intertwine with tournament through singers and figures moving across an articulated space of performance. As we can partially see in Figs. 28, and 29 such a space was composed of a raised stage with central stairs leading to a circular area on the ground, where balls, jousts, and equestrian choreographies were executed.

In his *Memorie Teatrali di Venezia* the Dalmatian chronicler Cristoforo Ivanovich affirmed that Obizzi’s ‘inventions’ ignited the development of opera and opera theatres in Venice by providing an example of how different audiences could be engaged with this genre, and be housed in a suitably layered space accommodating the Venetian citizenship and nobility, foreign aristocrats, and members of the academies.\textsuperscript{31} Ivanovich also emphasised that *L’Ermiona* stemmed from Obizzi’s attempt to ennoble tournament with narrative and visual representation. Furthermore, he concluded his dissertation entitled ‘Da che, e quando abbia avuto l’origine l’introduzione de’ Drami in Venezia’ remarking that *L’Ermiona* foreran, and led to the debut of *L’Andromeda* at the Teatro San Cassiano in 1637, the first opera to be performed in Venice.\textsuperscript{32}

According to Ellen Rosand, the shared cast of *L’Ermiona* (1636) and *L’Andromeda* (1637) is indicative of profound similarities that link Obizzi’s *feste teatrali* and the early operatic productions staged in Venice, from the aesthetics and organisation of the spectacle to the nature of the audience.\textsuperscript{33} The importance of the scenic element in the Venetian operatic productions is testified, for example, by the English traveller John

\textsuperscript{30} *Ibid.*, 53-54.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ivanovich (1681), 389-391.  
Evelyn, who commented upon the representation of Ercole in Lidia, held at the Teatro Novissimo in 1645, as follows:

This night... we went to the Opera, where commedies and other plays are represented in recitative music by the most excellent musicians, vocal and instrumental, with a variety of scenes painted and contrived with no less art of perspective, and machines from flying in the arie, and other wonderful motions; taken together it is one of the most magnificent and expensive diversions the wit of men can invent.34

The scenic element is also emphasised in Bonlini’s catalogue of drammi per musica staged in Venice from 1637 to 1730. Referring to La divisione del Mondo, represented at the San Salvatore theatre in 1675, the author reports that this opera ‘was admirable for the idea of the machine and illusionistic devices that accompanied the action within the scenes’.35

The operatic productions staged in the public theatres of Venice, however, could hardly match the visual impact of Obizzi’s feste teatrali, which continued to amaze seventeenth-century audiences with lavish spectacles aimed at celebrating the courtly world on festival occasions. In 1643, for the nuptials of Bartolomeo Zeno and Lisabetta Landi, Obizzi staged L’amor pudico at an ephemeral theatre built in Padua, in Piazza dei Signori.36 This time an amazing chivalric fight was enacted at night between live performers dressed as knights and machine a cavallo, mechanical monsters on horseback. The spectacle, held in a public space, delighted a mixed, non-paying audience.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Obizzi’s spectacles equally engaged learned and less discerning audiences is that Obizzi virtually embodied them all: he was an aristocrat, and yet a man who served some of the most powerful houses of northern and central Italy

35 Bonlini (1730), 81.
36 L. Manzini, L’Amor pudico, invenzione del signor Marchese Pio Enea de gli Obizzi, per un torneo a cavallo fatto la notte de’ 15 giugno 1643 in Padova per le nozze degl'Ill.mi Sig. Bartolomeo Zeno e Lisabetta Landi nobili veneziani... (G. Crivellari: Este, 1643). Music by Antonio delle Tavole.
by providing military forces and entertainments. Both these activities required his interaction with people of a different social status, from soldiers to military engineers, from acclaimed artists to street performers, from stage designers to puppet players. Additionally, Pio Enea II degli Obizzi was himself a member of different academies, including the Accademia degli Intrepidi in Ferrara, the Accademia dei Gelati in Bologna, and the Accademia dei Ricovrati in Padua. Finally, although his own inventions better fit into the sphere of court entertainment, he was able to cope with the ongoing changes of his time: the public theatre bearing his name in Padua was inaugurated in 1652, and the renovated Teatro Obizzi in Ferrara was unveiled in 1671.37

The theatrical festivals ‘invented’ and patronised by this eclectic nobleman from the 1630s to the 1660s are striking examples of how different genres of spectacle overlapped in the transition from court entertainment, meeting their patrons’ policies of self-display, to operatic productions directly meeting the entrepreneurial nobility’s strive for profit. They also show how dramatic figures could interact with live performers within the framework of a representation drawing together drama and music, dance and tournament, painting and sculpture to engage different audiences in a shared, although layered, space.

Aside from the reception in honour of the Prince Elector of Bavaria at the Catajo Palace in 1667, little is known about the feste teatrali that Pio Enea II degli Obizzi organised in this exotic residence with a life-size sculpture of an elephant at the entrance after the completion of the lengthy works required to realise the courtyard of the giants.

Walker observed that Obizzi’s undertaking possibly was taken as a model by Marco Contarini when he committed himself to making his villa at Piazzola sul Brenta

37 A biography of Pio Enea II degli Obizzi written by his nephew Tommaso is preserved in Padua, Biblioteca del Museo Civico, MS. BP.822.XIII, T. Obizzi, Compendio della vita di Pio Enea degli Obizzi, detto il Juniore (Padua, s.d.). On the life of this patron see A. Benacchio, ‘Pio Enea II degli Obizzi, letterato e cavaliere’, in Bollettino del Museo civico di Padova, IV (1901), nos. 3-4, 61-72; and nos. 6-7, 123-130. See also B. Brunelli, I teatri di Padova dalle origini alla fine del secolo XIX; Padua 1921, 72-112.
an outstanding location for performances of all kinds, including musical concerts, operas, and naval battle re-enactments. More than architecture, however, a shared passion for music and stunning spectacle virtually united Pio Enea II degli Obizzi and Marco Contarini. Another element in common between these two patrons of the arts was the aim to consolidate social prestige in the Venetian Republic by tightening key relationships with powerful personalities involved in military undertakings, whom they entertained in their splendid residences.

The Theatrical Microcosm of Marco Contarini

Since the fifteenth century the Contarini family, one of the ‘old Houses’ of the Venetian nobility, owned land and a country house at Piazzola sul Brenta, near Padua. This dwelling was rebuilt in 1546, possibly after designs by Palladio, turning it into a villa. In 1557 Marco Contarini (1541-1613) asked permission to create water channels in his estate at Piazzola sul Brenta with a view to make the property more beautiful, aside from rationalising the use of water for agricultural purposes. Nearly a hundred years later his nephew, the Procurator of San Marco Marco Contarini (1632-1689) further embellished this villa, in which he realised a music hall constructed like the acoustic chamber of a musical instrument. Additionally, he had side wings added to the main palace in order to create a porch leading to an ephemeral ‘grand theatre’ in the so-called loco delle vergini (site of the virgins).

This designation alludes to the fact that the theatre rose near the palace housing the female orphan school that was patronised by the Contarini family. The poor girls

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40 F. Rossi, Introduzione a L’orologio del piacere (Canova Edizioni: Treviso, 2003), 16.

41 See P. Camerini, Piazzola nella sua storia e nell’arte musicale del secolo XVII (Milan, 1929), 237–391.
who lived in this institution received musical education, and would actively contribute to the theatrical activity run by Marco Contarini. Such a practice was well established in Venice, where the conservatori of the ospedali forged countless female musicians and singers, who in return performed concerts that granted an income to these institutions.\textsuperscript{42} Although Contarini’s theatre was not open to a paying audience, the ability to rely on trained musicians performing as professional virtuosi, but not having to be paid as professional opera singers, undoubtedly represented an asset. Additionally, they printed and bound the libretti, which were distributed with white candles to the audience. The maidens also realised the costumes needed for the operatic productions, and the silk flowers that adorned one of the triumphal chariots staged in the loco delle vergini.

According to Ivanovich, Marco Contarini’s theatre was equipped with ‘a treasure trove of scenic machines’ and had a stage that was large enough to house a procession of chariots and realistic hunts with live animals.\textsuperscript{43} This is what the audience saw at the inauguration of the theatre, in 1679, when \textit{Le Amazzoni nelle isole fortunate} (\textit{The Amazons in the Fortunate Islands}) by the Venetian librettist Francesco Maria Piccioli was performed with music by Carlo Pallavicino.\textsuperscript{44}

The following year, on 8 November, \textit{Berenice vendicativa}, a production that has been frequently cited as an example of operatic Baroque by theatre historians for its prodigal display of gorgeous stage effects, debuted at Marco Contarini’s theatre with music by Domenico Freschi. The libretto of this opera, written by Giorgio Maria Rapparini in collaboration with an unidentified poet, is illustrated with thirteen engraved folding plates by Jacopo Ruffoni and Domenico Rossetti, twelve of which

See also F. Mancini, M. T. Muraro and E. Povoledo, \textit{I teatri del Veneto} (Venice, 1995), i/1, 291–311.


\textsuperscript{43} Ivanovich (1687), 414-420.

\textsuperscript{44} F.M. Piccioli, \textit{Le amazzoni nell’isole fortunate} (P. M. Frambotto: Padua, 1679). Music by C. Pallavicino.
reproduce the scenes by Francesco Saturnini. As was customary, these are listed in libretto after the *machine*.

The fourth scene in Act I, described as a ‘Wood for bear, deer, and boar hunts’, stirs imagination on the hunt enactments that were staged with live preys, some of which were killed by true hunters during the performance. Since the Middle Ages bears, monkeys, dogs, and other animals had been trained by street performers, who also exhibited exotic animals during festivals in many different European contexts, including Venice, but also the Byzantine and Ottoman empires. It is therefore possible that trained bears were exhibited (but not killed) by their masters in the staging of *Berenice vendicativa*. Showing off wild animals such as boars and deer, which could not be trained, certainly was a challenge. And yet this task was also accomplished as we know that Marco Contarini asked Pio Enea II degli Obizzi’s son, Roberto, to procure a stag for that occasion.

Aside from live animals, mechanically controlled figures were also staged as we can infer from the images and information provided in the libretto. The first scene in Act I, which is described as a ‘Very vast plain with two triumphal arches’, shows a pageant with the animals and chariots that are listed as scenic machines with the following descriptions:

- Two lions guided by two Turks.
- Two elephants guided by two further Turks
- The four-horse triumphal chariot of Berenice
- Six two-horse carts
- Six chariots.

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46 See Ivanovich (1687) 417-418.
From Piccioli’s *L’Orologio del Piacere*, a festival book describing the spectacles and performances that were held at Piazzola sul Brenta in 1686, we know that in Contarini’s theatre ‘two life-sized elephants rise at the sides of the proscenium, each of which bears a castle on its back. When required, these elephants can artfully be made movable, and wander around’. These pieces of information address the interpretation of the engraving by Domenico Rossetti in the libretto of *Berenice Vendicativa*, in which the two elephants in question can be seen (Fig. 33). As listed among the scenic machines, the lions presumably were also mechanically controlled figures.

A precious visual record of the performance of this opera is *The Theatre* by the Veneto artist Alessandro Piazza in the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts (Fig. 32). This painting offers an invaluable insight into Marco Contarini theatre, and can be regarded as a snapshot taken whilst *Berenice Vendicativa* was being performed therein. The singers stand in the proscenium before a linear perspective scene that corresponds with the description in the libretto of the third scene in Act I, a ‘Piazza prepared for the triumphal entry’. The two movable elephants at the sides of the proscenium arch can also be seen, as well as the orchestra pit, four rows of boxes housing elegantly dressed noblemen and noblewomen holding or throwing the *libretti*. The rounded parterre accommodated a mixed audience including, amongst others, masked spectators, prelates, and foreigners wearing Middle Eastern clothing.

Neither from Piazza’s painting nor from Rossetti’s engraving can we understand the working system of the scene-change apparatus. From Tessin’s travel book we know that it was a proto-hydraulic device, through which obliquely-positioned scenes were

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Ivanovich reported that the theatre had a grid overlooking a watercourse, which ensured refreshment for this environment during the summer. Evidently, this was not the only reason why the theatre was built near the channel that had been realised in the sixteenth century.

Indeed, as in the Catajo Palace, theatrical activity at Villa Contarini relied on the skilful use of hydraulic systems exploiting a tajo, or ditch in the land of the properties. The courtyard of the giants designed by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi was a kind of ‘convertible’ space, which could house either tournaments or, when flooded, naval battle re-enactments. Marco Contarini’s estate at Piazzola sul Brenta, instead, had gardens with channels that were virtually a dedicated space for waterborne spectacle that can still be seen today (Fig. 35). As already mentioned, Piccioli’s L’Orologio del Piacere bears witness to the entertainments, including two naumachie with musical performances, which were organised at Villa Contarini in 1686 in honour of Ernest Augustus IV, Prince-Bishop Elector of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1629-1698). This festival book includes the libretti of the different ‘pleasures’ offered ‘round the clock’, and a number of engravings that show the wondrous mechanical figures that were staged in the gardens, on water, and in the music hall.

The festival in question started with the Serenata sulle acque (Serenade on the Waters), a waterborne spectacle that Piccioli described as follows:

Quanto abbracciava il lungo tramite bagnato dalla delicia di quell’acque,
era da ogni lato oltre modo luminoso, reso tale dalla magnifica erettione
di molte statue, al naturale, ed intere, che con mirabile disposizione divise
su l’eminenza di quelle rive, con il lampo acceso di numerose faci,
aprivano all’incostanti apparenze del flutto una scena di fuoco. […] Finito

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a pena questo musicale applauso, e galeggiando al quanto il Buccentoro con
la scorta delle Galere in quel seno di delizie, comparvero d’inproviso
dall’onde in facia allo stesso, successivamente tre machine. La prima era
figurata Nettuno asciso sopra d’una conchiglia tirato da due cavalli marini;
la seconda scortava Eolo a cavallo d’un delfino, la terza rappresentava
Amfiritre sopra d’altro mostro consimile. Questi tre personaggi sostenuti
dalle figlie stesse, al concerto sonoro di ripiena Sinfonia, snodaro le voci al
canto rappresentando nuovo poetico intreccio, figurato La schiavitù
fortunata di Nettuno.

Everything embraced by the long trait of these waters was very much
illuminated by several magnificent life-size, full-figure statues, which had
skillfully been placed along the higher shores, where they stood bearing
torches. Reflecting on the wavy surface of the water, their flames created
a scene of fire. When the ships came a little closer, we heard the loud
sound of trumpets and other instruments, which introduced an
harmonious four-voice symphony entitled the Prophecy of Fortune.
Performed by the maidens who stood on a balcony overlooking the
channel, this suave melody for more than one hour delighted the
audience, who remained uninterrupted silent as they were amazed by the
curious marvels before their eyes […].

At the end of this musical performance, while the bucintoro and the
galleys were floating in that delightful site, all of a sudden three machine
appeared amidst the waves, one after the other. The first one to be seen
was the figure of Neptune on a shell carried by sea horses. The second
one was Eolus riding a dolphin. And the third one was Amphitrites riding
a similar beast. These three characters, supported by the maidens, were
the protagonists of a new poetic and visual narrative entitled La schiavitù
fortunata di Nettuno (The Fortunate Slavery of Neptune). 52

52 F.M. Piccioli, La schiavitù fortunata di Nettuno (Piazzola sul Brenta, 1685). In L’orologio del piacere.
An engraving in the festival book shows the appearance of the scenic machines that were used in this representation conjoining music, poetry, and visual narrative. These floating sculptures can be seen in one of the prints included in the festival book (Fig. 36), which also provides a description of their aesthetics and reception as reported below.

La costruzione di questi mostri, che senza scoprirsi il modo, scortavano le deità sopradette, era assai nobile, ed ingegnosa, facendo a gala dei flutti gareggiare I finti ritratti dell’arte con gl’originali veridici della Natura: ma ciò che in essi s’ammirò di più raro fu singolar diletto il vedere gl’occhi di que’ squamosi, luminosi ogni modo, e trasparenti, e molto più l’osservare che questi con il moto, hor chiuso ed hor’aperto delle fauci, e delle narici, givano gentilmente spruzzando d’odorifere stille i spettatori vicini.

The construction of those monsters, which carried the aforementioned godly figures without disclosing their system of motion, was praiseworthy and ingenious because on the surface of the waves these fictive portrayals of Art competed with the true originals of Nature. The most admirable feature of these squamate creatures was the extreme transparency and lightness of their eyes, and even more amazing was the fact that by opening and closing their mouths, and flaring their nostrils, they gently sprayed scented water on the spectators around them. 53

From this commentary we can infer that the favourable reception of these giant water puppets depended on the fact that they aroused marvel as their appearance and ability to move by means of a concealed mechanical system made them appear as animated beings playing with perception. For a moment, according to a verse sung by the vergini, the viewers would see ‘Art and Nature as castaways in the sea’. Another element that emerges from Piccioli’s account is the synesthetic experience that was offered to

53 Ibid.
Contarini’s guests, whose bodily senses of sight, hearing, and smell were stimulated in a stunning environment.

I believe that these mechanically controlled figures that only apparently moved freely on the water surface of Villa Contarini’s channel as if they were animated beings challenge the notion of puppet theatre. This multi-faceted art form took many forms, each reflecting the culture in which it developed. Some of its expressions eventually absorbed the heritage or influence of different traditions, but in the immaterial sphere of performance often no concrete evidence bears witness to cross-fertilisation or cross-over that occurred in a distant past. The marine monsters with scales and crystal-clear eyes that enlivened Villa Contarini’s channel and their mode of performance made me think for a moment about the water puppet theatre of Vietnam, which originated in the eleventh century. This Asian puppetry tradition entails singing with musical accompaniment, lighting effects, and puppeteers who remain hidden below ground level while handling the submerged rods that control their floating figures. No historical water puppets from Vietnam are extant, but a twentieth-century *Water Dragon* in the Museo delle Marione ‘Antonio Pasqualino’ is believed to replicate an old traditional model (Fig. 79).

If the rod-and-string Hydra puppet in the Borromeo Collection can ideally be regarded as a miniature of the mechanically-controlled Hydra used in Obizzi’s 1636 theatrical feast, then the same nexus can be established between the indirectly-controlled water puppets from the East like the Vietnamese *Water Dragon* in Palermo, and the mechanically-controlled sea monsters used in the waterborne spectacle at Villa Contarini (probably sliding in grooves under water level). This association remains purely theoretical as at this stage it has not been possible to establish whether Contarini’s *naumachia* described above simply replicated earlier precedents rooted in the Western culture of the Renaissance or to some extent absorbed an influence from Southeast Asia, which had
been on the Venetian trade routes since the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{54} Marco Contarini was married to Pisana Corner at San Maurizio, a Venetian noblewoman belonging to a family who had made their fortune trading and investing in the East. Also in the light of this element a possible influence from a distant culture lying behind the spectacle under consideration should not be excluded in this case.

Turning back to the entertainments that were organised within the framework of the ‘round-the-clock pleasure’ festival at Piazzola sul Brenta in 1686, attention should be given to another spectacle conjoining music, verbal narrative, and visual narrative, \textit{Il ritratto della Gloria donato all’eternità (The Portrayal of Glory Donated to Eternity)}. As reported in the festival book, after a banquet a ‘celestial monster, able to move its head, mouth, and tail’, descended from the ceiling to the ground, at the centre of the music hall. Then, spreading its wings, it became the scenic setting for five female performers who sang the glory of ‘the Contarino’, and with their voices honoured ‘the greatness, valour, and virtue’ of his illustrious guest.\textsuperscript{55}

The giant eagle that amazed the audience in Marco Contarini’s music hall in 1686 could be the same mechanically-controlled figure that was used in \textit{L’Odoacre}, staged in the theatre at Piazzola sul Brenta in 1680. Described as the only \textit{machina} in the libretto of this opera, unfortunately without any illustration, is ‘Jupiter riding an eagle’.\textsuperscript{56} I believe that this scenic machine was the same \textit{Jupiter Riding an Eagle} that had been used for the representation of \textit{L’Ermiona}. A clue validating this assumption can be found in Piccioli’s libretto of \textit{L’Ermelinda}, staged at Marco Contarini’s theatre in 1686.\textsuperscript{57} In Piccioli’s libretto of this opera we can read that the Prologue was set in the Palace of Fate full of clouds, which scattered around and disappeared at the outbreak of

\textsuperscript{55} F. M. Piccioli, \textit{Il ritratto della Gloria donato all’eternità} (Piazzola sul Brenta, 1685).
\textsuperscript{56} G. Varischino, \textit{L’Odoacre} (Piazzola sul Brenta: 1680).
\textsuperscript{57} F. M. Piccioli, \textit{L’Ermelinda} (Piazzola sul Brenta: 1685).
a storm with thunder and lighting, followed by the sound of trumpets and tambourines. This very moment is illustrated in an engraving, showing five clouds, each surmounted by an allegorical figure – Fate (at the centre), Genius, Love, Suspicion, and Virtue – that would sing a strophe of the prologue (Fig. 34). An analogue ensemble of five clouds with as many figures on top had also been used for the staging of L’Ermiona (Fig. 28). Pio Enea II degli Obizzi died in 1674, and it is likely that Marco Contarini acquired the stage machinery from his heirs, who no longer used it. It appears therefore that material and immaterial heritage of the feste teatrali invented by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi passed on to Marco Contarini.

In 1686 the latter’s ‘round-the-clock pleasure’ festival also envisaged the re-enactment of a naval battle between Christians and Turks, a recurring theme that could certainly not be omitted by a Venetian patron wishing to entertain a man at arms who had just set up a military school in Venice. Such a project had come into being because the Venetian Republic was preparing to fight against the army of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV commanded by the Grand-Vizier Sari Süleyman Paşa. Due also to the alliance with the forces of the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, the Venetians would defeat the Ottomans in the Second Battle of Mohács that same year. The naumachia at Piazzola sul Brenta, optimistically entitled Il preludio felice (The Happy Prelude), was thus a well-wishing spectacle.58 After its conclusion, lunch was offered on the relatively small-scale reproduction of the Bucintoro, the doge’s vessel, surrounded by other ships.

The ‘round-the-clock pleasure’ festival at Villa Contarini ended with a sumptuous dinner, but only after the appearance of a triumphal chariot carrying ‘two seventeen-feet-high sea horses and two horses ridden by four lavishly dressed maidens’, who sung Il merito acclamato (The Acclaimed Merit).59 The triumphal chariot on which

58 F. M. Piccoli, Il preludio felice (Piazzola sul Brenta: 1685). In L’Orologio del piacere.
59 F. M. Piccoli, Il merito acclamato (Piazzola sul Brenta: 1685). In L’Orologio del piacere.
they stood ultimately disclosed the main purpose of the festival as a whole, aimed at celebrating the alliance between Venice and the Holy Roman Empire against the Ottomans, and also the friendship between Marco Contarini, Procurator of San Marco, and Ernest Augustus IV, Elector of Brunswick-Lüneburg. Conforming the practice of entwining the coat of arms of the groom and bride in spectacles celebrating dynastic marriages, the heraldic shield with the coat of arms of the Contarini (placed on the front of the triumphal chariot) turned into the coat of arms of the Brunswick-Lüneburgs by means of a concealed mechanism.

*L’orologio del piacere* was undoubtedly the most lavish festival held at Piazzola sul Brenta, where pinnacles of artistic achievement continued to be staged until 1688 in the *loco delle vergini*, which, according to Pierre d’Ortigue de Vaumorière, was unrivalled in Venice.60 Similarly unequalled remained the extravagance of the Catajo Palace, whose courtyard of the giants evokes the ‘inventions’ of its eclectic patron.

**Material and Immaterial Heritage**

The death of Pio Enea degli Obizzi II in 1674 and Marco Contarini in 1689 marked the end of a fabulous season of spectacles in the private sphere of the Venetian Republic, although different kinds of operatic productions would continue to be performed in public and private theatres in this context, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Catajo Palace and Villa Contarini still stand, but nothing remains of the scenic apparatus and mechanically-controlled figures that delighted the elite audiences in the performance spaces built on these estates. The *loco delle vergini*, basically an ephemeral structure, although richly adorned, is no longer extant. The collections of performance-related are no longer preserved in their residences.

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At the death of the last Marquis of Orciano, Tommaso degli Obizzi, the Catajo Palace was inherited by Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Este, who took the collections of weapons and musical instruments gathered by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi to the castle of Konopiště, Czech Republic. A comparable collection of weapons and armours of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including a rare shipboard suit of armour, can be seen in Venice, in the Armoury of the Correr Museum. After World War I the Catajo Palace was confiscated by the Italian government, and sold to the Dalla Francesca family, who currently owns it.

Marco Contarini’s collection comprising more than one hundred and twenty musical instruments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which formed a complete orchestra, plus several harpsichords and organs, passed on by inheritance to the Correr family at his death. In the nineteenth century some of these instruments were acquired by the Royal College of Music in London, but the rest ended up in Brussels, in the Musical Instrument Museum. Marco Contarini also amassed a collection of scores, which were acquired by the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, in 1839. As Ellen Rosand observed, this gathering included fair copies and autographs. This means that Marco Contarini, like Pio Enea degli Obizzi II, aimed at collecting a heritage of performance by preserving functional objects as well as objects of memory. Pursuing this intent both the above patrons of the arts embraced the idea of crystallising the world in microcosms, which could be Wunderkammern, miniatures of various kinds, or even small-scale theatres reproducing the likeness of real models. These would house figures that man could illusively bring to life by artifice recreating nature. Such a concept

64 Rosand (1991), 29.
opened the door to the development of puppet opera, which added artifice to the combination of drama, music, and elaborate stage design that had characterised opera and its archetypes.
PART 2

Puppet Opera and Private Theatre
CHAPTER IV

Puppet Opera in Seventeenth-century Venice and its Echoing in Rome

The architects of the Renaissance revived the use of scenic figures in theatre, but it is in the Baroque era that string puppets played protagonists in marionette operas, which were staged mainly in private playhouses, but eventually also in theatres open to a paying audience. The shows envisaged motions with wondrous illusionistic effects, perspective scenes, and finely crafted figures stirring curiosity about their system of motion. In Rome, Venice, and neighbouring states puppet opera met the taste of the educated elite: it engaged members of the aristocracy and high clergy in a complex, enthralling spectacle that pleased their ‘eyes and the ears’ at the same time. Not without a little irony, this kind of representation epitomised the neo-Platonic ideal of an inanimate artistic figure brought to life by the harmony of music, and was regarded as a refined form of spectacle.

Blurring the boundaries between visual and performing arts, marionette opera shared values and aesthetic principles with related genres, and yet the role it played in cultural exchange was unique: little iconic figures could be moved from the space of performance to the sphere of collecting, where they continued to stir imagination on the intangible heritage of distant worlds and myth. The rare early eighteenth-century pieces that are extant remind us of the shows performed in finely crafted domestic theatres.

The rise of marionettes as protagonists of theatrical representations in Venice will be discussed in this chapter reconstructing a chronicle of musical representations that were staged using different kinds of scenic figures in different spaces of performance – private and public, secular and religious. This reconstruction is based upon libretti, scores, and chronicles of the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. Critical analysis of this material has been made examining artefacts in museum collections that could be
slightly later than the aforementioned written sources, but whose provenance, construction, and iconography offer clues to imagine the appearance and movements of the figures that were used in the relevant performances, and their reception.

While tracing a history of puppet opera in Venice, the more salient characteristics, aesthetic principles, and recurring themes of the representations held in this context will be brought to the fore analysing performance space and time, artists, and audience when possible. Attention will also be drawn to analogies and differences between the performances that we know were staged in Rome, Paris, and Venice.

**The Origins of Puppet Opera**

The first marionette opera to be recorded in Europe is *La comica del cielo* by Pope Clement IX (born Giulio Rospigliosi), which was staged in Rome in 1668 with music by Anton Maria Abbatini. The apparatus and probably also the figures were made by Gian Lorenzo Bernini.¹ A famous Roman puppeteer, Domenico Filippo Patriarca, was paid 36 *scudi* for playing the figures at Palazzo Rospigliosi. *La comica del cielo* was so successful that the Princess of Rossano was asked by the nuns of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio in Rome to hire Patriarca so that a reduced version of the opera could be staged in the courtyard of the monastery that same year. Thereafter puppet operas were staged in the noble palaces of Rome during carnival for elite audiences.²

Shows of this kind soon became fashionable in France. In March 1675 the Italian-born puppeteer Dominique de Normandin obtained from Louis XIV the *privilège* to give marionette plays with music, motions, and ballet entries at the Théâtre du Marais in Paris.

¹ That was not the only time in which Bernini engaged in puppet opera. In his diary the English traveller John Evelyn noted that the ‘Florentine sculptor, architect, painter, a little before my arrival to Rome, gave a public opera (for so the call a shows that kind), wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues, invented the engines, composed the music, writ the comedy, and built the theatre’. J. Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, edited by W. Bray (W. Dunne: London, 1901), II (1665-1706), 120. See also R. Fahrner and W. Kleb, ‘The Theatrical Activity of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’, *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 25, no. 1 (Mar. 1973), 5-14.

The operatic productions staged were *Les Pygmées* (1676) and *Les amours de Microton, ou les charmes d’Orcan* (1676), then the royal permission was revoked.\(^3\)

The type of marionettes employed, known as *pygmées* or *bamboches* because of their dimensions, smaller than life size, derived from earlier figures used by itinerant street players in the sixteenth century. Two known examples of the late seventeenth century formerly belonged to the musicologist Roberto Leydi (current whereabouts unknown).\(^4\) Similar Venetian rod-and-string puppets dating to the same period or slightly later, are the *Nobleman* and *Noblewoman* in Lyon, Musées Gadagne (Figs. 37-38).\(^5\)

Their construction appears to match that of the marionettes described in Ottonelli’s 1652 treatise, which were designed for a scene measuring ‘about four *palmi* in height and width, and two *braccia* in length’. Such a scene was very well lit by means of lamps placed under and above a ‘raised stage’, and had ‘a grid of iron wires in its backside’.\(^6\) A similar structure was used in France in the late seventeenth century, as Normandin’s appellative ‘sieur de la Grille’ is a hint at this grid. The function of the grid was to trick the eye reducing the visual perception of the marionette’s rod on top of its head, and black silk threads at its hands and feet. Regardless of their dimensions, figures of that kind had not been used to represent opera in Venice by the time they became popular in Rome and Paris, but were probably used by street players, whose presence in Venice is discussed in Chapter VII. In 1677 restrictions on theatrical performances, including puppet shows, started to apply in Rome as Pope Innocent XI permitted representations only on condition that scandalous words were not to be spoken and women were not to perform. Perhaps it is also because of this last prohibition that puppet opera gained momentum in other contexts, first and foremost in Venice.

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\(^6\) Ottonelli (1652), ‘Terzo Trattato, intorno a’ Ciarlatani’, 462-463.
The Debut of Puppet Opera in Venice: *Il Leandro (Leander)*, 1679

According to Bonlini, in winter 1679 *Il Leandro, dramma per musica* with lyrics by Camillo Badoer and music by Francesco Antonio Pistocchi ‘was represented with wooden figures, while the musicians and singers were performing behind the scenes’ at the small, private theatre known as Teatro alle Zattere, near the church of Ogni Santi’. This was the first puppet opera to be staged in Venice.

The libretto of *Il Leandro* (Fig. 39) reveals that the show envisaged a remarkable number of machine, which were used to represent ‘the chorus of Nereids lifting Leandro from the waves of the sea in a shell; amorini flying from the sky to take Leandro onto the clouds; Venus on her starry chariot approached by putti; Leandro and Hero carried into the sky on bright clouds; the transformation of Hero into an oleander tree; the flight of Cupid; Venus on a cloud, and two amorini pulling down the curtain’. Scenic machines of this kind were customary in Baroque theatres, especially in the opera theatres of seventeenth-century Venice, as wondrous effects pleased the taste of the audience. In his chronicle Ivanovich remarked that the Venetians would have liked the fact ‘that every scene of the drama could come across with a change, and that the inventions of the machine could be sourced from out of the world’. That comment validates the indications provided in a seventeenth-century manuscript known as *Il Corago*, which includes a chapter recommending the use of machine to engage the audience with amazing, enjoyable figural solutions:

Fra l’altre cose che nelle scene si rappresentano non pare a me che alcuna ve ne sia che più delle machine rapischino gli animi delli spettatori, poiché il vedere cose che quasi sono soprannaturali come d’uno dalla terra salire al cielo, l’apparire una nugola in mezzo la scena ripiena di

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7 Bonlini (1730), 90.
9 Ivanovich (1687), 408.
suoni e di canti’ il vedere dal mezzo della terra surgere un tempio,

e il mutarsi in un tratto tutta la scena in scogli o selle, il vedere subito
comparire il mare et in quello tritoni, deità, navi e simili altre cose
dove l’occhio rimane ingannato, reca infinito diletto, come
chiaramente si conosce dalla curiosità che hanno gli omini di vederle:
che viene cagionata e dal diletto che inesse l’occhio riceve, e dalla
curiosità di saperne il modo col quale sono operate, di che Chiara
testimonianza ci fanno questi giocolatori di mano che il popolo con
tanta curiosità si ferma a vedere.

(Nothing more than scenic machinery captures the viewer as it is
ininitely enjoyable to see things that trick the eye, and thus appear
supernatural: someone taken from the ground into the sky; a cloud
appearing on a scene at the sound of music; a temple rising from the
ground; and that scene suddenly changing into another one with rocks,
woods, or the sea with ships, tritons and other gods amidst its waves.
These and other similar things give pleasure to the eye and also arouse
curiosity about the way in which they are controlled, as happens with
those puppeteers performing sleight-of-hand tricks, which people
observe with so much interest). 10

Rare small-scale examples of the machina del mare (Fig. 41) and machina per le nuvole
after Sabbatini’s model (Figs. 42 and 43) have survived in the main marionette theatre
at the Borromeo Palace in the Isola Madre on Lake Maggiore (Lombardy). 11

No mention of marionettes is made in the libretto of Il Leandro, but in the
printer’s foreword issued for the replica of this dramma per musica with the title

10 Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS y.F.6.11; Il Corago, 1623-1637. Published by P. Fabbri and A. Pompilio
(eds.), Il Corago o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche
Gl’amori fatali (The Ill-fated Loves) (Fig. 40) at the San Moisè theatre in 1682, it is written that:

Questo drama […] fu composto per bizzarria dell’autore, obbligato alle curiosità dello spiritoso direttor della scena nell’introduvi le azioni più considerabili, ad oggetto di rendersi stupido ammiratore d’un evidente impossibile.

(This drama […] stems from the bizarre inventiveness of an author obliged by the playful stage designer to introduce the most impressive motions so that [the viewer] could be the amazed admirer of something manifest yet impossible.\(^{12}\)

The perception of an object as a dramatic character able to move and speak like a live being despite the awareness that such an object cannot be animate is at the heart of what Jurkowski calls the ‘opalisation effect’ in puppet theatre, a key element of its aesthetics.\(^{13}\)

That kind of ‘double vision’ involving a constant shift between estrangement and engagement, illusion and reality, had been exploited by Ben Jonson in his Bartholomew Fair (1614). The play features a narrator who first shows his puppets as artefacts to the audience, but then pretends they are alive because they can move and speak in a puppet play mocking the story of Hero and Leander, which was a popular theme in early seventeenth-century Europe. By that time Nicholas Lanier, ‘master of the king’s musick’ at the court of Charles I, had composed his Complaint to Leander (Nor Com ’st thou yet), a cantata in recitative style with poetry inspired by Ovid’s verses, and music revealing the influence from Monteverdi. Besides, Rubens had completed his Hero and Leander at the court of Mantua.\(^{14}\) As poet of the Duke of Mantua and informant of the Venetian Inquisitors, Badoer certainly was

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\(^{12}\) C. Badoer, Gl’amori fatali (C. Valvasense: Venice, 1682), 5.


acknowledged with the artistic achievements of his epoch, including the success collected by puppet opera amongst members of the high clergy and aristocracy in Rome.\textsuperscript{15}

It appears that in 1679 Badoer drew these precedents together to present a pioneering performance in Venice, where puppet opera was hitherto unseen. The harmony between music and the movement of forms was a crucial issue for a successful outcome: the score had to be composed matching the metrics of the strophes and taking into account that figures had to be moved following a precise rhythm. The artist who achieved this goal was Antonio Francesco Massimiliano Pistocchi, child prodigy, singer and composer (1659-1726) known as ‘Pistocchino’, who probably sang as well during the representation as he recovered his lost voice during his stay in Venice. Unfortunately the score of \textit{Il Leandro} is lost. Thinking about Pistocchi’s musical background while examining the structure of the text of this opera, however, we may speculate on what kind of music could have been composed to meet the needs of its representation with figures. For such purpose, it may be worth giving some thought to Baroque music.

It is conventionally accepted that the division between Renaissance and Baroque music began following the inception of the Florentine \textit{Camerata}, a group of humanists, musicians and poets who gathered in 1573 under the patronage of Count Giovanni de’ Bardi seeking to revive the arts of classical antiquity. In relation to theatrical representation, their fundamental belief was that drama should be predominantly sung rather than spoken, based on the writing of the Greek thinker Aristoxenus. As such, they developed the recitative style giving shape to their belief that poetically-structured speech should set the pattern for song and in 1598 the musician Jacopo Peri and the poet Ottavio Rinuccini composed \textit{Dafne}, a drama for multiple voices to be sung in monodic

style. This work is considered the first opera and a catalyst of Italian Baroque music, which was contextually developing in other main centres of music aside from Florence and Venice for instance, but also Ferrara, Rome and Bologna in the Papal States. In Venice the new style of monody (a primary melody in the upper range accompanied by the instrumental parts) initiated in Florence, was theorised in 1605 by Monteverdi as the second stream of musical practice typical of the Baroque sonata, envisaging freer counterpoint; an increasing hierarchy of voices, emphasising soprano and bass; and words prevailing on harmony. The Baroque sonata originating in Venice was further developed at the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna giving way to duo and trio sonatas or, in other words, compositions for one or two melodic instruments or voices, respectively. Then, it was with Arcangelo Corelli (active mainly in Ferrara and Rome) that two broad classes, sonata da chiesa and sonata da camera, were established, with the latter considered as music proper for use at court in that it consisted of a prelude followed by a succession of dances.

After many years at San Petronio, his début as a singer in Ferrara in 1675, and his experience in Venice, Pistocchi could not but draw inspiration from the music of great masters such as Monteverdi and Corelli, and use the solutions with which they impressed the audience: sudden changes of tempo; improvised vocal embellishment; counterpoint emphasising the hierarchy of soprano and bass voices; basso continuo with improvised instrumental variations; and sonata da camera for dance.

The libretto of Il Leandro offers evidence in support of this hypothesis. Firstly, there is rapid succession of characters entering and exiting the many scenes so it is probable that music envisaged sudden changes of tempo. Secondly, sung dialogues take place between two or three characters at a time, almost likely performing a duo or trio

16 D. Arnold and N. Fortune (eds.), The New Monteverdi Companion (Faber and Faber: Boston, 1985), 233.
sonata, respectively. Such a limited number of characters/voices in one scene suits the needs of marionette theatre as one or two players would be enough to manipulate the figures. Thirdly, the notation ‘etc’ at the end of some strophes indicates repetition of the initial section of the strophe, followed by the contrasting section, and such repetition involves sung improvisation. Automated figures could hardly move in synchrony with improvised music, but figures constructed to be manipulated freely could achieve this. Finally, both the first and second acts end with a dance, the ‘ball of drunk sailors smoking tobacco’ and the ‘ball of knights and ladies’, which were performed by cortegi (groups of dumb figures) in synchrony with the rhythm of an instrumental sonata.

For the richness of its apparatus and the two balls of figures in costume, followed by the final choreography with scenic devices, Il Leandro mirrors closely the representational scheme of earlier forms of court entertainment. The balls in particular remind Philippe d’Agliè’s balets comique de la Reine performed on festival occasions from the 1620s to the 1660s at the court of Marie Christine de Bourbon in the Duchy of Savoy, with which Venice had a close alliance. Comparing a miniature by Giovanni Tomaso Borgonio, who designed the costumes for d’Agliè and illustrated the latter’s entrées de balet in a bunch of manuscripts, with the silk costumes for a group of Venetian marionettes now at the Davia Bargellini Museum, Bologna, we can realise the relation between the choreographic patterns of the balet de court and the balli of marionette opera (Figs. 44 and 45).

Marionettes were combined with opera as they fit the aesthetics of this spectacle, which demanded images or forms giving shape to the imagination stirred by the music. With their power to bewilder the audience, figures on stage that appeared animated met the ever increasing demand of artifice and wondrous motions in the age of

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Baroque. Transformations such as that of ‘Dafne turning into a laurel tree’, mentioned in the libretto could be achieved easily with trick puppets like the *Lady Transformable into a Dwarf* displayed at the Davia Bargellini Museum, whose mechanism of transformation can be understood by examining an incomplete example stored in this museum (Fig. 46). By pulling a string, the puppeteer will suddenly change the appearance of this figure as the skirt of the lady flips and is transformed into the head of a dwarf. A similar marionette, also incomplete, is the early-eighteenth-century *Dancer* in Venice, Ca’ Goldoni Museum (Fig. 47).

*Il Leandro* is the first *dramma per musica* with marionettes to be presented in Venice, where it debuted in a private playhouse, and was also the last one to be performed in a public theatre for a paying audience in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Venice. With the moralising title ‘Gl’amori fatali’, *Il Leandro* was to conclude the cycle of marionette operas presented at the Teatro San Moisè from 1680 to 1682.

**A Three-year Season of Puppet Opera at the Teatro San Moisè**

From Bonlini’s catalogue we know that in the Winter Seasons of 1680, 1681, and 1682, ‘operas with figures’ were represented at the Teatro San Moisè because ‘no greater spectacle was possible in this theatre since it had been stripped of its proscenium and boxes by order of the owner, who wanted to transform it into a residence’.19 Possibly in an attempt to earn some income even when renovation works were in progress, at least during the foremost theatrical season in Venice, an ephemeral structure was mounted in a provisional space made available before the stalls ‘in the site where the theatre belonging to the Zane family was located, in the Parish of San Moisè’.20 Here three *drammi per musica* by Filippo Acciaiuoli (1637-1700), playwright, stage designer and puppeteer,

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19 Bonlini (1730), 94.
were represented with puppets controlled by means of fine wires. Acciaiuoli’s famous words ‘I prefer comedy to tragedy, farce to comedy, pantomime to farce, and puppets more than all the rest’ explain why he put so much effort into figural representations.21

Unfortunately neither the apparatus nor the figures used in these representations are extant, but the libretti, all of which have survived, provide clues to speculate on their design. Almost coeval Venetian marionettes and scene sets now at the Ca’ Goldoni Museum in Venice and the Davia Bargellini Museum in Bologna can help reconstructing what is lost. This material as well as the only score preserved will be examined with a view to grasping the aesthetics of Acciaiuoli’s puppet operas and, not least, their reception in Venice.

*LA DAMIRA PLACATA (DAMIRA PLACATED), 1680*

The first of Acciauoli’s works to be represented at the Teatro San Moisè was *La Damira placata*, with music by the Venetian composer Marc’Antonio Ziani (1653-1715).22 According to Antonicek, who studied the score preserved at the Biblioteca Marciana, this *dramma per musica* stems from Filippo Acciaiuoli’s re-elaboration of *Le fortune di Rodope e Damira*, staged in 1657 in Venice at the Teatro Sant’Apollinare with lyrics by Aurelio Aureli and music by Pietro Andrea Ziani, uncle of Marc’Antonio.23 Filippo Acciaiuoli changed the names of the protagonists of the earlier libretto (Rodope into Fillide, Bato into Silo, Nerina into Lerina, and Lerino into Nerillo) to elaborate a new version of the story, featuring Damira as sole protagonist.

It appears that this work aroused curiosity for its innovativeness since it was announced, as far as we can assume from a letter dated 14 October 1679 by Matteo del Teglia, resident in Venice from Tuscany, reporting that ‘in the forthcoming Winter, at the

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22 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana [MSS. =09929], M. Ziani’s score of *La Damira placata*.
Teatro San Moisè, an opera with music will be represented with some figures of new invention. In his catalogue Bonlini provided some information about the figures of *La Damira placata* specifying that ‘this drama was represented with natural wood figures of extraordinarily refined work’. We can understand the meaning of this description, ‘figure di legno al naturale’, by looking at the Venetian marionette inventoried as *Mercante in foggia orientale* in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum (Fig. 72).

From an iconographic point of view, this figure is a recognisable type in that its long orange tunic, moustaches, light coloured slippers and turban (now lost) allowed the audience to identify it immediately with an Armenian merchant as depicted in Le Glen’s costume book of 1601 (Fig. 73). The Armenians had been a community in the Republic since the fifteenth century so their portrayal should have been truthful in terms of image, movement and sound to please the Venetian audience. From the technical point of view, the articulated arms and legs (with joints at the hip, knees and ankles) and above all the lead hands and feet working as counterbalances, typical of the Venetian tradition, make this kind of string puppet suitable to execute the movements of the ‘ballo degli armeni’ (dance of the Armenians at end of act II). The ‘ballo dei folli’ (dance of the fools is at the end of Act I) could be performed by figures like the Fool trick marionette dressed in a long white tunic with a wide collar in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum (Fig. 48). This figure has articulated arms and a variable height body controlled by a set of strings so that it could execute jumps and foolish movements, and at the same time arouse hilarity for its odd appearance.

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25 Bonlini (1730), 95-96 and 90.
26 J. de Glen, *Des habits, mœurs, cérémonies, façons de faire anciennes & modernes du monde, traicté non moins utile, que délectable, plein de bonnes & sainctes instructions* (Liège, 1601).
27 Tassini (1863), 39.
From various indications in the libretto we can infer that the figures used during the recitative parts were articulated too; for example in Act I, scene IV, Odoacre ‘dismounts a horse’. This animal figure was probably constructed like the one of the nine articulated wooden *Horse* marionettes with lead shoes and silk saddle that are preserved in Bologna, Davia Bargellini Museum (Fig. 74).

It is possible that finely crafted figures with articulated construction and counterweights like the marionettes preserved in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum and the Davia Bargellini Museum were used for the staging of *La Damira Placata* at the San Moisé theatre. We have no direct evidence allowing us to establish either their size or operating technique, but we can assume that the main characters were handled individually, whilst the groups of dumb figures were probably moved by making their rods slide on rails either from above or below. Morei’s description of the puppet theatre made by Filippo Acciaiuoli for Ferdinando de Medici in 1684 gives an idea of how it functioned:

> [The puppet theatre] was constructed for 24 changes of setting and 124 figures, all made with such skill that he [Acciaiuoli] himself could direct the whole opera alone, with his own hands, needing others to adjust the figures in their channels – figures which, by way of their counterweights, miraculously moved along said channels – and to prepare the settings arranging the machinery for the prologue, *intermezzi* and the action of the opera, which he had invented himself.\(^{28}\)

In his recent book on Italian puppet theatre, McKormick has published a drawing by the architect Jacinto Maria Marmi showing a temporary theatre built in Palazzo Pitti, Florence, for a puppet show to be performed therein by Acciaiuoli (Fig. 49).\(^{29}\) This drawing, which is dated 18 May 1684, shows figures that evidently could slide on rails

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through mechanisms housed in the space below the stage. From documentary sources of that same year, we know that these figures were controlled below by means of ‘very fine wire’, which evidently made the ‘old’ grid no longer necessary.\(^{30}\)

In Acciaiuoli’s dedication to the audience printed in the libretto of *La Damira placata* we may find the key to understanding the reception of the figures he designed with the aim of inspiring curiosity about the system of motion that made them look like animated creatures:

**SIGNORI CURIOSI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(TO THE CURIOUS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voi, che saper bramate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I segreti più occulti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De l’Arte, e di Natura.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deh cortesi gradite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quest’Opra, ch’io consacro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al genio Vostro, e ad ammirar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>venite,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiusi in angusta parte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I portent dell’Arte;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che stupidi vedrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sforzo d’umano ingegno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con muti gesti ad animar un legno;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E confusi direte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch’in picciola figura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa l’Arte far, ciò che non fa Natura.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vostro Servo devoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il Bell’umore.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

who are eager to know
the most hidden secrets
of Art and Nature.
You shall enjoy
this work, which I consecrate
to your genius
so come
to admire from a small box
the wonders of Art:
amazed you will see
the effort of human ingeniousness
with silent gestures enliven wood;
And confused you will say that
with a tiny figure
Art can do what Nature does not.
Your devoted Servant,
The Good Humour).\(^{31}\)

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It is worth remarking that, in order to give the illusion that the figures could sing and move as animated beings, the singers performed behind or under the scene as did the puppeteer and the assistants. This mode of representation was possible because opera envisaged a clear distinction between male and female voices, while the hierarchy of voices in Baroque counterpoint enhanced the understanding of musical dialogue. Ultimately, these musical features enhanced the visual understanding of the representation, and therefore it was no longer necessary to display coloured signs to help the audience match figures and voices in the way described by Gian Domenico Ottonelli in 1652:

Ho saputo da un pratico artiere che con certi virtuosi compagni si dilettava in certo tempo dell’anno di far alcune di questa attioni figurate; che essi havevano più di cento pupazzi, e nel fare un’attione procedevano così. Due di loro havevano cura di mutar le scene; uno teneva aperta l’opera fregiata in più luoghi con segni di vari colori, per avvisar la mutation della voce, volendo che il color rosso significasse la voce delle Donne, il turichino quella de gli Huomini, & il verde le voci buffe, cioè buffonesche.

Quest’opera è letta di mano in mano da un recitante, il quale forma la voce secondo richiede la qualità della figura che è maneggiata, non da lui, ma da un altro recitante, al quale sta pronto un altro compagno, che gli porge le figure da maneggiarsi, e da lui riceve le maneggiate: e così si frappongono belle musiche, e soavi sinfonie per rendere più gradita la figurata rappresentatione.

I was told by a skilled craftsman that some virtuous fellows enjoyed staging representations with figures for a certain period during the year; they had more than one hundred puppets and to stage the representation proceeded as follows: two of them changed the scenes, and one kept the written poem open. This had

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32 Ivanovich (1687), 445.
signs of various colours, which were used to indicate the voice changes: the red colour indicates the voice of a woman; turquoise indicates that of a man, and green symbolises the voice of a buffoon. The poem is read by a narrator, who changes his voice according to the type of figure that is manipulated, not by himself, but rather by another performer helped by someone who gives and takes the figures. Fine music is played from time to time to make the figural representation more pleasant.33

This mode of performance was used traditionally by street players, as we may see from A Puppet Show on the Piazzetta (c. 1740) by Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as ‘il Canaletto’ in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 103). In this painting the narrator with a long stick indicates something on a panel to the left while at his right, on a raised stage, two glove puppets are manipulated by another performer hidden in the theatre box. Seated on the ground, a flute player provides musical accompaniment.

From the analysis of the score of La Damira placata made by Antonicek, it emerges that the music composed by Marc’Antonio Ziani for this work adheres to the Venetian models of mid-seventeenth century opera.34 It includes melodic ariette reminding those of Monteverdi or Cavalli and instrumental sonata da camera for dance. Contrapuntal techniques include repeated bass lines and imitative counterpoint; these are important for the composition of musical ‘ironies’, which serve not only to intrigue listeners into complexities of compositional texture, but also to enhance the hearing of musical dialogue.35

33 Ottonelli (1652), 462-466.
35 In 1980 La Damira placata was represented in Venice at the Teatro Malibran as a result of a project sponsored by Teatro Regio di Torino and Teatro La Fenice with the collaboration of the puppeteers of the Compagnia Lupi. Some photographs of this reinterpretation are preserved in the historical archive of the Teatro La Fenice (B2886), but no recording was made.
L’Ulisse in Feaccia (Ulysses in Phaeacia), 1681

L’Ulisse in Feaccia by Acciaiuoli with music by Antonio del Gaudio débuted at the Teatro San Moisè in winter 1681. The score is lost, but the libretto has survived. The latter includes Acciaiuoli’s dedication to the reader, which reveals the author’s intent to further amaze the Venetian audience after the favourable reception of his earlier work:

AMICO LETTORE. L’aggradimento che dimostrasti della Damira placata, mi fa credere, che sarai per compatire anco l’Ulisse in Feaccia.
Ho procurator con la scelta del Drama di porti in scena un oggetto aggradevole, che animato dalla musica di soggetto virtuoso porterà al tuo udito soave trattenimento. E se la vista si diletò per Avanti in vedere gl’atteggiamenti umani ben’espressi da un legno, or nelle figure formate di cera, apprenderà più vaghi stupor di quelli di Dedalo, poiché non suppongono precipizij. Vieni a vedere, e compatendo vivi felice.

(DEAR READER, The appreciation demonstrated for the Damira Placata induces me to believe that you will like L’Ulisse in Feaccia too. With the choice made for this drama I aimed to put on the scene an attractive object which, animated by the music of a virtuous subject, will please your ears suavely. So if your eyes already enjoyed seeing human behaviour expressed by a piece of wood, this time, looking at wax moulded figures, you will experience even more amazement than Daedalus in that there won’t be any precipice. Come and see, have fun, and farewell).36

Perhaps seeing himself like Daedalus, Acciaiuoli presented the latest artifice of his ingeniousness: wax puppets that in Homer's language would have been connoted as

36 F. Acciaiuoli, L’Ulisse in Feaccia (F. Nicolini: Venice, 1681).
daidala (from Daedalus), finely crafted. That L’Ulisse in Feaccia was actually represented ‘with wax figures’ is confirmed by Bonlini in his catalogue.\(^{37}\)

In Venice Acciaiuoli would not have found difficulty in having wax figures made with realistic skin tones as the city was famous for its skilled cereri, based in the parish of Santa Maria Maggiore, as recounted by Tassini. In his book about the Venetian festivals the chronicler also affirmed that, in Venice, wax statues to be carried in procession were made during the Renaissance.\(^{38}\) A rare example of these sculptures is Jacopo Sansovino’s gilt Virgin and Child in Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts (inv. 1177).\(^{39}\)

The naturalism of Acciaiuoli’s puppets, according to Jean-Baptiste du Bos, possibly matched the appearance of the wax automata (angels with moving eyes and writhing bodies) that had been mounted on Rubens’s great altarpieces of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier in the Jesuit Church of Antwerp in July 1622.\(^{40}\) That same year similar wax figures evoking a strong response from the viewer had also been displayed in procession for the canonisation feast of the saints held in Rome, but not in Venice as the Jesuits had been banned from the Republic in 1606 and were not to return until 1657.

Muir has stressed the importance of this period of intellectual freedom from the repressive action of the Jesuits as a precondition for the development of opera in Venice: ‘The banishment of the Jesuit Order had created opportunities for two generations of seriously playful, mostly young intellectuals, some of whom had libertine inclinations, and it was these nobles and their foreign friends who promoted and supported early Venetian opera’.\(^{41}\) I would add that the banishment from Venice of the only order that

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\(^{37}\) Bonlini (1730), 96.

\(^{38}\) Tassini (1863), 75-76.

\(^{39}\) Images of Sansovino’s wax sculpture (cm 65 h.) are published in the institutional website of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. On this work see the museum’s institutional web site, http://www.szepmuveszeti.hu/adatlap_eng/virgin_and_child_q_class_2529; 16 September 2014.


was allowed to practice convent theatre after the Council of Trent could be the reason why Acciaiuoli’s wax puppets were perceived as innovative by the Venetians: unlike Rome and Antwerp, Venice had not been a theatrum of the wax automata shown off by the Jesuits in 1622. In Florence, Acciaiuoli’s native town, this circumstance would be irrelevant because the Florentine nobles used to commission life-sized effigies of themselves in coloured wax, which they dressed with their own clothes and offered to churches to ask or give thanks for a grace (ex voto). This practice, however, was not widespread in Venice.

No wax marionettes of the seventeenth century have survived in museum collections. A wooden Venetian Lady at the Davia Bargellini Museum, however, provides evidence of the aesthetic result achievable with this material as its stylish hairdressing, enriched with golden pins, is made out of wax (Fig. 69).

IL GIRELLO (THE VAGABOND), 1682

Acciaiuoli ended his cycle of representations at the Teatro San Moisè with his burlesque drama Il Girello, with music by Francesco Antonio Pistocchi. According to Bonlini, ‘This drama, which was represented here with little wax figures, had been staged many times elsewhere’. It had debuted in 1668 in Rome as the intermedio of Rospigliosi’s La comica del cielo and was then replicated in Bologna (1669), Florence (1670, 1674), Siena (1672), Naples (1673), Livorno (1673), Modena (1675) and Reggio (1676), but it is in Venice that it was first staged with figures.

The reasons underpinning the playwright’s choice to opt for a figural representation seem to be due, apart from his passion for puppets, to the desire of

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43 Barbagiovanni (2003), 21.
pleasing the Venetian audience with a show matching their taste for the bizarre and the illusory, as we may read from Acciaiuoli’s foreword:

AMICO LETTORE. Hora ti presento una bizzarria dramatica, dico una bizzaria, perché ell’è una terza entità partecipante del comico e del drammatico. Quest’è Girello, parto d’ingegnosissima penna, alter volte veduto campeggiare con indicibile applause su le scene d’Italia. Vi troverai in esso qualche alteration della nova tessitura del verso, ma non però varierà il suo essere sostantiale. Il tutto ho fatto per conformarmi allo stile corrente, che sempre inclina alla novità. So che il genio di Venezia è tutto capriccio; ama assaissimo le bizzarrie, e come chi ha la culla fra le false onde così si diletta deelli argui Sali, e delle spiritose vivezze. Accoglila dunque con il tuo solito aggradimento, e nell’inscorgere figureine insensate ad esprimere al vivo qualunque si sia nostra humana attione, comprendi il vivissimo desiderio che tengo di perfettamente compiacerti.

(DEAR READER. Let me introduce you to a theatrical oddity, a bizarre work in between comedy and tragedy. That’s Il Girello, the offspring of an ingenious pen, already applauded various times on the scenes of Italy. Minor variations have been brought to the texture of the verses, but the substance is unchanged. All this was done to conform with the current style, which is always inclined to novelty. I know that Venice demands caprice for her genius, and very much loves bizarre things. As her cradle is among false waves, she enjoys wit, liveliness and good spirit. So welcome this work and enjoy it as usual. And when you will see nonsense figures performing all kind of actions made by humans, I hope you’ll realise that it is my great desire to please you with perfection). 44

Perfection is a charming word and a hard task to achieve: in marionette opera and even more strikingly in Eastern puppet theatre traditions such as Arabic shadow theatre and *Bunraku*, perfection is achieved through the harmony of sound, movement, and design, as only harmony can engage the audience in the fictional dimension of the representation, which is fragile. The continuous shift between illusion and reality, engagement and estrangement, is at the heart of the ‘opalisation effect’ of puppet theatre, borrowing Jurkowski’s words. By way of this peculiar aspect puppet theatre could well be exploited in Baroque representations, which envisaged the play between real and unreal, false and true, as well as constant changes in the rhythm of sound, movement, and form. Reading through the sequence of scenes described in the libretti and summarised in Table 1, we realise that in all the seventeenth-century marionette operas there is no unity of space, but rather an alternation of open-air and enclosed scenes, a solution that the stage designer Giacomo Torelli had theorised to create a sense of rhythm in visual narration.

In *Il Girello* identity is also subject to change by inversion, and shifting between false and true: a sorcerer transforms Girello into King Odoacre and the latter into the protagonist, but in the end the illusion set by magic is reversed into the right order of things. The iconic figure of the sorcerer could be an autobiographic reference to Acciaiuoli as inventor in between the mathematician and the *negromante*, two distant figures that Tommaso Garzoni had associated in his *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* for their ‘ability to produce artificial things that are very similar to natural things, such as bodies that can move and speak but have no soul inside’. No wonder ‘il gran stregone’ (the great sorcerer) was the appellative given to the famous scene designer and stage machinist Giacomo Torelli (1608-1678), usually associated

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with the evolution of the chariot system of stage machinery developed for shifting huge scene sets in the more splendid theatres of the Baroque era.\textsuperscript{46}

Unlike the other two \textit{drammi per musica} with figures by Acciaiuoli discussed earlier, \textit{Il Girello} is a \textit{dramma burlesco}. This kind of show was much cheaper to produce than a \textit{dramma serio per musica’}, as Goldoni would have remarked later on.\textsuperscript{47}

The reason for such an assertion can be understood by comparing this work with the other puppet operas that were staged at the Teatro San Moisè (see Table 1). In Acciaiuoli’s puppet operas, motions are almost absent and the balls are gradually abolished, widening the difference between his works and \textit{Il Leandro}, which reflects the structure of late Renaissance representations with choreographic entrées and wondrous scenic devices. The absence of records of puppet operas in theatres open to a paying audience after 1682 would suggest that the adoption of the ‘cost-reductions’ and simplifications that had been implemented already were not sufficient to make puppet opera profitable.

Nonetheless, an endeavour aimed at replicating the ‘experiment’ carried out at the Teatro San Moisè was undertaken in Rome by a Venetian prelate and patron of the arts. At the turn of the century this patron gave a new breath of life to puppet opera in Rome, blending the legacy of his native town with Acciaiuoli’s inventions rooted in Florence and the creativity of artists and architects active in the eternal city.

\textbf{Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni: a Venetian Patron of Puppet Opera in Rome}

Pietro Ottoboni (1667–1740), cardinal nephew of Pope Alexander VIII (born Pietro Vito Ottoboni), is remembered for his ambitious patronage of music, theatre, visual arts,

\textsuperscript{47} Selfridge Field (2007), 101.
and architecture. Less known, perhaps is his interest in puppet opera, which can be regarded as a synthesis of all his passions.

Educated in music, poetry, and the arts, Ottoboni was a playwright himself. In carnival 1691 Ottoboni’s pastoral *Il trionfo dell’amore* (*The Triumph of Love*) with music by Alessandro Scarlatti was staged with costly figures at the Palazzo della Cancelleria, where he had lived since 1689.

A letter in the State Archives of Modena reveals that, on 16 January 1692, ‘Sunday evening, Cardinal Ottoboni made arrangements for the performance of one of his operas with puppets at Prince Savelli’s palace [in Albano], where he was aided by assistants handling four of his creatures’. Two years later, again at Albano, Ottoboni set up another performance with puppets. As far as we can assume from the short account provided in an *Avviso* (review) of 23 October 1694, the reception of this show was favourable in that Ottoboni’s endeavour is described as ‘an amusing puppet play with music that was very much enjoyed by the guests of His Excellence’.

In 1696 another pastoral by Ottoboni, *L’Eurilla, o amor eroico tra i pastori* (*Eurylla, or Heroic Love amidst the Shepherds*) was staged with figures in the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome, where he lived. Refreshments were served during the show, as was customary in the Venetian musical theatres at that time. Again the reception was favourable, with an unknown Accademico Arcade publishing the sonnet entitled

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‘Dedicated to the sublime idea of the author of *L’amor eroico tra i pastori*’ to praise the composition of his peer, whose academician name was Crateo Ericino, as follows:

_These Heroic Loves, which in oat woods _
you set triumphant on the Tiber _
are the honour of buskins and scenes; _
they belong to those hearing their amazing harmonies. _
_Here they sing playing Orphic plectra _
with swans and sirens intoning melodies _
while nymphs and shepherds, as masters of Love, _
show us how love should be. _
Loose and painted pieces of wood seem animated _
and, by virtue of industrious ingeniousness, _
show love and affection through their face and chest _
Amazement is wilfully aroused _
and good sense is withdrawn from astonished minds _
so spirit is given to trunks and voice to wood. _52_

These verses on one hand testified to the favourable reception of Ottoboni’s puppet operas amongst an educated elite, and on the other hand revealed Ottoboni’s aim to surprise his audience by giving breadth of life to inanimate figures. Overall the sonnet echoed Acciaiuoli’s forewords in the libretti printed for the Venetian season of his puppet opera ten years earlier. Not by chance, the puppets that were used in this Roman performance were those of Acciaiuoli, which the cardinal had inherited from the playwright.53 A vague description of these puppets is provided by a contemporary, the abbot Du Bos, in a passage of his _Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture_ referring to his sojourn in Rome in 1701:


The puppet opera invented by de la Grille, which was set up in Paris around 1674 attracted everyone for two winters. This spectacle was like an ordinary opera, but the acting role was executed by a great marionette, which made gestures in accordance with the lyrics sung by a performer, whose voice came out from an opening in the board of the scene. In Italy I saw opera performed in this way, and nobody found that it was a ridiculous spectacle. The operas that an illustrious cardinal liked to stage that way, when he was still young, were also very much appreciated because the marionettes, nearly four-feet high, had very natural semblance'.

This commentary is very important because it tells us much about the reception of puppet opera as a genre in Baroque Europe. It also compares the French and Italian marionettes of the 1670s with those of the 1690s, most likely of Cardinal Ottoboni. Rather than in size and operating technique, it appears that these figures differed from earlier ones for their enhanced naturalistic appearance, an effect that could best be obtained with wax.

In 1704 Ottoboni’s *La pastorella* was performed with puppets in Palazzo San Marco (today Palazzo Venezia), which belonged the *Serenissima*, and where he had lived from 1681 to 1689. On this occasion ‘all the roles were sung by ‘a virtuoso musician priest… who changed his voice from time to time’. Such a practice was

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54 L’Opera des Bamboches, de l’invention de la Grille & qui fut établi à Paris vers l’année mil six cent soixante & quatorze, attira tout le monde Durant deux hyvers, & ce spectacle était un Opera ordinaire, avec la différence que la partie de l’action s’exécutoit par une grande Marionette, qui faisoit sur le theatre les gestes convenables aux récits que cantoit un Musicien, dont la voix sortoit par une ouverture ménage dans le plancher de la scène. J’ai vu en Italie des Opera représentez de cette maniere, & personne ne le trouvoit un spectacle ridicule.Les opera qu’un Cardinal Illustre se plaisoit à faire executer de cette maniere-la, quand il étoit encore jeune, plaisoient meme beaucoup, parce que les Marionnettes qui avoient près de quatre pieds de hauteur, approchoient du naturel’. J. B. du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 249. Cited in Campanini (2004), 196-197.

customary in earlier puppet shows, usually staged with a narrator who changed the pitch of his voice to give vocal power to the dialoguing figures with which he interacted.

This practice was abandoned on 12 February 1705, when Ottoboni’s *La pastorella* (a later version of the 1696 pastoral) was performed with puppets at Palazzo San Marco as this ‘superb representation was sung by the best virtuosi in Rome’ in honour of the Venetian ambassador in Rome, Gian Francesco Morosini. The original score composed by Carlo Cesarini, Francesco Gasparini, and Giovanni ‘del violone’ was adapted by Alessandro Scarlatti. With regard to the virtuosi, mention should be made that the most famous musicians and singers hired by Cardinal Ottoboni included Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni, maestro di cappella in the basilica of San Lorenzo in Damaso, the keyboard virtuoso Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710), the violinist Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), the cellist Filippo Amadei (1675-1729) the castrato singer Andrea Amadei (1663-1743), and the soprano singer Margherita Durastanti (c. 1685-1734).

Puppet opera was not the only form of spectacle patronised by Cardinal Ottoboni that mirrored his passion for dramatic figures. In the Holy Year 1700, during carnival, this eclectic prelate offered a wondrous spectacle at the church of the Santissimo Sacramento in Rome. Here, the faithful admired an apparatus described in an anonymous booklet as follows:

This year on the eighteenth of February, in the day commonly called ‘fat Thursday’ around midday, after the solemnly sung Mass, everyone saw an extraordinarily lit machina, within which the Holy Sacrament would be shown. This great scenic machine represented the celestial Jerusalem

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surrounded by clouds and an angelic host in glory. Above this machine a scroll with the inscription *Et Iusti intrabunt in eam* was illuminated with candles. There also was a portal, which was meant to be the gate of paradise. It was enriched with several crystals, which reflected the light, and thus appeared to be gems of different colours. The gate was surmounted by an epigraph with the inscription *Hac est Porta Caeli*. The walls of the Celestial Jerusalem, although fictive, were also gleaming in the distance, so that the viewers strived to reach this heavenly city. Then, guided by a guardian angel, a soul passed the gate and reached the city of joy and rest. This representation was made with figures as follows: a life-size angel took by the hand a fair and graceful child, whose foot was chained to the earthly world, from which he departed with great difficulty, like a soul struggling to leave the body. This amazing machine was very much applauded because its inventor made something appropriate to the celebrations of the Holy Year. The colours were subtle and delightful. We expected them to be like that because the idea of this machine stemmed from the sublime ingeniousness [of Cardinal Ottoboni], and its realisation from the famous brush of Giovanni Francesco Pellegrini, who distinguished himself with other similar remarkable achievements... 59

The crystals mentioned in this description reveal the cultural background and taste of Cardinal Ottoboni, who had boasted of his Venetian origins in carnival 1690 by reaching the newly reopened Teatro Tordinona on a gondola sailing the Tiber. That same year he would not miss the waterborne pageant held in Venice in 1690 to celebrate the coronation as *doge* of Francesco Morosini, when twelve *peote* (boats) carrying as many ambassadors of the senate of the Most Serene Republic preceded the *bucintoro* (the *doge*’s vessel) on the Grand canal. The anonymous author of the festival book printed for the occasion reports that the *peote* aroused marvel as each of them was

59 *Distinta Relatione della Sontuosissima Machina...* (G. F. Buagni: Rome, 1700).
‘sumptuously decorated’ and ‘enriched with beautiful, transparent crystals’. 60 Cardinal Ottoboni loved them: he spent a fortune on crystals destined for his Roman residence during his lengthy sojourn in Venice in 1693. For the realisation of the spectacular apparatus shown in the Holy Year he probably relied on the Venetian scene designer, architect, and specchiaro (mirror maker) Antonio Codognato, who became famous for his special effects and light-play obtained with crystals and mirrors in the theatres of Venice. The chronicler Gradenigo defined him as a ‘specchiaro, uomo di vaga idea e di azzardosa resolutione’ (mirror maker, man of inventiveness and challenging resolution), who renovated the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo providing it with magnificent lighting through candles and cioche, the huge crystal lamps visible in an eighteenth-century painting of this theatre (Fig. 51). 61

Still in 1690, lavish spectacles were held in San Marco to celebrate the election of a Venetian native, Pope Alexander VIII, as we can read in the festival book printed for the occasion:

The Piazza San Marco all of a sudden was turned into a Roman amphitheatre, full of fireworks, lights, and machines. One of them seemed to be a volcano overflowing like a fountain with fire. All night long the people admired the lavish spectacle offered by the Most Serene Republic, who was able to show to the world the impossible made possible. 62

The conclusive remark of this account tells much about Venetians’ politics of display and ambition for wondrous spectacle. Indeed, it is with this taste for artifice that around

1708 Cardinal Ottoboni committed himself to building a theatre in Rome, in the Palazzo della Cancelleria, where he lived. He commissioned this project from architect Filippo Juvarra (1678-1736).

According to Olszewski, ‘because Ottoboni could depend on neither a family fortune nor independent means, he had hoped to turn to the theatre as a source of income. His papal great-uncle had conveniently relaxed the rules put in place by his predecessor, Innocent XI, forbidding theatrical performances’. It appears that Ottoboni optimistically aimed at bringing to Rome the Venetian entrepreneurial model of theatre management, and puppets were part of his design.

From Maffei’s *Elogio di Filippo Juvarra* we know that the cardinal had been persuaded by Francesco Pellegrini, who was extremely clever in mechanics, to let him build a small theatre in a room of his palace, where puppets could be played to represent honest and noble *operette in musica*, and where only a restricted number of high-rank, trustworthy spectators were admitted. [...] Pellegrini and Juvarra worked together to realise this theatre. Indeed, scenes, perspectives, and machines of such wonder and ingeniousness were unseen in sites of small dimensions like that one.

Unfortunately, neither the machines nor their drawings have survived. One hundred and twenty-seven stage designs that Juvarra made for Ottoboni’s theatre are in London, Victoria and Albert Museum, and more are preserved in Turin, Biblioteca Reale. The image that more than any other gives an idea of the dimensions and seating capacity of this theatre, however, is the etching by Nicola Michetti on the frontispiece of

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63 Olszewski (2002), 140.
the libretto of *Carlo Magno*, performed in 1729. Based on this etching in particular, as well as documentary sources, Olszewski argued that the audience hall in the Palazzo della Cancelleria was 35 feet high, and 26 \(\frac{1}{2}\) feet deep, with the lateral boxes barely 22 feet apart. There were four tiers of boxes, and yet individual boxes could only accommodate two people as they were only 4 \(\frac{1}{2}\) feet wide and slightly less than four feet deep. The theatre was U-shaped, with a narrow stage and a tall proscenium arch.\(^{67}\) In a performance space with these characteristics, if rod puppets were used they had to be operated from a functional space below the stage, whilst the space behind could house the devices controlling the scenic *machine*. Viale Ferrero and Brinkmann doubted that Juvarra’s theatre was used for performances with puppets because its dimensions allowed live actors to perform on stage. Schiavo supported their opinion based on the fact that a *teatrino domestico* was also set in a room of Palazzo della Cancelleria, and most likely puppet operas were staged in this smaller framework.\(^{68}\) Signorelli argued that small string puppets operated from above, like the marionettes in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum could be used in the *teatrino domestico* for rehearsals, whilst bigger rod puppets operated from below could be used for the representations in the *teatro di rappresentanza* designed by Juvarra.\(^{69}\) I think that Signorelli’s idea is the most plausible because the solution that she hypothesised finds a parallel with a documented instance at Esterhaza, which will be discussed in Chapter V. Moreover, Speaight agreed with Signorelli’s assumption remarking that ‘the stilted conventions, the lack of action, the long held gestures of *opera seria* are ideally matched by the slow, contrived but strangely impressive movements of the rod puppet’.\(^{70}\)

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66 Olszewski (2002), 139-165.
67 Ibid., 151.
We know that Acciaiuoli’s puppets were used in Ottoboni’s theatre as the eighteenth-century music historian John Hawkins reported that:

little wooden figures were the actors, which by means of strings contrived by two famous mechanics, Count St. Martini and Chevalier Acciaioli, were made to move with surprising grace and agility: the expense of this singular exhibition may in some measure be guessed at, when it is known that each of these little figures cost the Cardinal a hundred pistole.71

The verb ‘contrive’, instead of ‘pull’, used by Hawkins suggests that the puppets could be manipulated from below by means of wires attached to springs, although their operating technique is still open to question. Marmi’s drawing of the ephemeral theatre built for Ferdinando de Medici in Palazzo Pitti shows that Acciaiuoli’s puppets staged therein in 1684 were supposed to slide on channels with mechanisms below the stage (Fig. 49). It is therefore reasonable to think that Acciaiuoli’s puppets in Ottoboni’s theatre had the same construction also because a stage design drawn by Juvarra in 1708 and now in London, Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. 8426:47), indeed reveals that Ottoboni’s theatre had a space below stage level and housed sliding rails (Fig. 50). These were used for backdrop changes, and also to drive the movement of machine and figures on the scene.

Two puppet operas attributed to Ottoboni were performed in his theatre in 1710 and 1711, Costantino Pio and Teodosio il Giovane, respectively.72 A few years later, under the pontificate of Clement XI (1700-1721) the time would have come for all theatrical productions to be prohibited in Rome again. No puppet performances are


recorded in Ottoboni’s theatre even in the 1720s and 1730s, but during this period the 
cardinal dedicated himself to an old passion, the \textit{machine}.

According to the Roman diarist Francesco Chracas the cardinal honoured the 
Grand Duchess of Tuscany at the 1727 Christmas meeting of the Arcadian Academy by 
sponsoring a concerto performance that ended with the appearance of a grand \textit{machina} 
with Apollo and the nine muses.\textsuperscript{73} The following year he commissioned from the architect 
Alessandro Mauri a wondrous apparatus themed ‘Triumph of Faith’ for the spectacular 
celebrations of the Corpus Domini in the basilica of San Lorenzo in Damaso, annexed to 
the Palace of the Cancelleria.\textsuperscript{74} The most stunning \textit{machina} of which we have notice, 
however, is the one that he commissioned from the architect Giovanni Battista Oliverio 
and the painter Ginnesio del Barba for the memorial services for Alexander VIII in 
February 1735. This apparatus envisaged the mechanically-controlled figures of seven 
bishops of Asia imploring St. John the Evangelist to write his gospels until John 
actually appeared, sat at a table, made the act of writing on an open book, and pointed 
with his left hand to the exposed sacrament above a scroll with the words ‘lux in 
tenebris luce’.\textsuperscript{75}

When Ottoboni died, in 1740, the theatre in the Palazzo della Cancelleria was 
dismantled and the material sold for 150 \textit{scudi}, nothing compared to what it cost. This 
jewel-like theatre, which Speaight defined as ‘perhaps the most splendid in the whole 
course of Europe’, was lost forever.\textsuperscript{76}

The debts of 170,000 \textit{scudi} included in the cardinal’s legacy and the short time 
taken by his heirs to get rid of a theatre on which the curtain had already been dropped

\textsuperscript{73} Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, F. Chracas, \textit{Diario Ordinario (Rome)}, vol. 45, no. 1627 
\textsuperscript{74} Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, F. Chracas, \textit{Diario Ordinario (Rome)}, vol. 45, no. 1639 
(7 February 1728), 4-6. Cited in Olszewski (2002), 156.
\textsuperscript{75} Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, F. Chracas, \textit{Diario Ordinario (Rome)}, vol. 45, no. 2732 
(5 February 1735), and 2738 (19 February 1735), 4-7. Cited in Olszewski (2002), 156.
\textsuperscript{76} Speaight (1955), 10.
reveal that Ottoboni’s original intention to make it profitable had failed. His jewel-like theatre remained a domestic theatre. In any case it was fairly small, and therefore Ottoboni’s costly productions could not possibly be funded with the income from a paying audience to be gathered when theatrical activities were not forbidden in Rome.

It appears that the economic issues that had already precluded the Venetian Teatro San Moisé to stage puppet opera since Acciaiuoli’s last performance also contributed to eclipse puppet opera in Ottoboni’s Roman theatre from the 1720s to the year of its dismantlement. In Venice, the lack of operatic productions with figures in public theatres would last throughout the Settecento. During this period, puppet opera as a self-standing genre derived from earlier forms of court entertainment would remain confined to private, aristocratic performance spaces sponsored by wealthy patrons, who in return would acquire social and political prestige.

Only in the nineteenth century would the Teatro San Moisè once more offer marionette plays with musical accompaniment. In Venice and other cities experiencing the political and social changes brought by Napoleon such as Milan and Turin, however, this kind of show was staged in small permanent theatres open to a less discerning audience, unwilling or economically unable to afford attending opera or ballet in major theatres. To meet the taste of the nineteenth-century bourgeois society, marionette opera gradually lost the sophistication that originally characterised it as a self-standing genre, and embraced a repertoire of simplified adaptations, although often enlivened with hilarious figures of folk theatre. Old characters of the commedia dell’arte were included in the plots, and new ones were created (for example Facanapa) or adopted from different traditions. Although deserving scholarly attention, this phase falls beyond the parameters of space and time set for this research, which is circumscribed by the rise and fall of the Venetian Republic. The history of Venice’s puppets, to be continued in the last two chapters, will therefore end in this thesis as the eighteenth century draws to a close.
The development of puppet opera in Venice during the eighteenth century will be outlined in this chapter examining relevant materials preserved in museum collections. After reconstructing a history of the Venetian marionette theatres originating in Venice, comparisons will be made with marionette theatres in other cultural areas, for instance the Papal State, Lombardy, and the Habsburg domains. Attempts will be made to highlight the connections between these contexts, and better understand the role that Venice played on the international scene. Comparisons will be made with a view to identify recurring themes, shared aesthetic principles, and common practices, but also differences and crossovers. The artists, patrons, audiences involved in the representations, and of course the figures that were used, will be investigated for the purpose of understanding the reasons for the rise and decline of puppet opera in Venice and other cities at different times during the course of the Baroque age.

**Teatrini Domestici in Eighteenth-century Venice**

After the three-year season of puppet opera at the Teatro San Moisè (1680-1682), which has been discussed in Chapter IV, it appears that no productions with figures were staged in the public theatres of Venice, as neither libretti nor reviews testifying to performances of this kind have been located. Shows of this kind, however, continued to be performed in domestic theatres as it became fashionable for the Venetian nobility to have a marionette theatre built in a room of their palaces to entertain themselves and their guests on special occasions and feast days.
THE MARIONETTE THEATRE OF THE GRIMANI AI SERVI FAMILY

From a manuscript of the Venetian erudite Emanuele A. Cicogna (1789-1868) we know that marionette plays were staged in 1720 at Ca’ Grimani ai Servi in Venice.¹ This little theatre has survived, and its history has been reconstructed. In the first decades of the eighteenth century it was in the Grimani ai Servi palace, near the convent of the Servites. Its last owner was the only daughter of Giovanni Grimani and Caterina Contarini, Loredana Grimani, who married Francesco Morosini di Santo Stefano, ambassador and capitano di mare in 1772.² In subsequent years, possibly also because the family palace was demolished, the marionette theatre was brought to Villa Grimani Morosini in Martellago.

Built in the sixteenth century, this beautiful villa was enlarged and renovated by Antonio Grimani (1701-1775), patron of the arts and exponent of one of the most prominent families of Venice. Musical and dramatic performances were staged in the sala delle feste of this residence, including Carlo Goldoni’s L’amante di sé medesimo (1760), which the playwright dedicated to his host.³

In the nineteenth century, Villa Grimani Morosini and other estates of the family were split between different heirs, and the little theatre became the property of the antiquarian Fausto Oreffice, who donated it to the civic museums of Venice in 1896.⁴ This endowment was made after Salvatore Arbib’s offering of ‘a gathering of Venetian fantoccini of 1700, comprising more than one hundred figures’, which had been kept in Palazzo Berlendis at the fondamenta del Malcanton in the sestiere of Dorsoduro, and would

² Accademia dei Concordi, Gli eroi Morosini per le faustissime nozze del nobil uomo Francesco Morosini colla nobil donna Loredana Grimani (G. Miazzi: Rovigo, 1772).
³ A. Barbiero, Villa Grimani-Morosini dal 1500 ai giorni nostri (Martellago, 1992). See also M. Esposito (ed.), Civiltà e cultura di villa tra ‘700 e ‘800 (Venice, 2000), passim.
⁴ Venice, Archivi dei Musei Civici Veneziani, prat. 1896/65.
become the property of the Musei Civici Veneziani on 22 April 1892.\(^5\) For nearly a century these Venetian marionettes were showcased at the Museo del Settecento Veneziano in Ca’ Rezzonico, and Museo Civico Correr, Venice.\(^6\) In 2001, after undergoing conservation work, they were moved to the Ca’ Goldoni Museum. Since then they have been permanently displayed in the marionette theatre that formerly belonged to the Grimani ai Servi family (Fig. 54).

The frontal part of the wooden theatre framework, painted in light-green and enriched with gilt decoration, measures 175cm x 250cm, including the proscenium arch and two doorways (84cm x 190cm) at the sides, which were used by the performers to access the backstage. This domestic theatre is equipped with one fixed scene depicting a Venetian interior (175cm x 200cm), which appears to be part of the original framework, built in 1720.\(^7\)

The marionettes displayed in this marionette theatre today fit its dimensions perfectly. They are relatively small (38-42cm in height) and finely crafted. Some of them are dressed in costumes made with fabrics that are slightly later, perhaps from the 1740s. The most elaborate clothing is enriched with embroidery, copper, silver, and gold filet trimming, and also metal sequins. Some of the marionettes have glass paste


\(^{6}\) A photograph with the marionettes in a showcase at the Museo Civico Correr is published in Ricciotti Bratti, ‘Marionette del Settecento’, La Lettura, year X, no. 1 (January 1910), 59-66. A later photograph testifying to a different mode of display of the same marionettes, which were set in a small theatre box at the Museo Civico Correr, is published in, A. Nycoll, *Masks, Mimes and Myracles. Studies in the Popular Theatre* (Harrap & Co.: London, 1931) 275.

eyes, and are finished with skin-tone painting. Of the one hundred marionettes in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, forty-nine are exhibited, some of which are in their incomplete state, whilst the remaining ones are stored. The pieces on display include two animals, a sheep, and a leopard (inv. 365/39-40). The human simulacra include Venetian nobles and servants (inv. 365/8-25, 365/27-29, and 365/47-49); characters of the commedia dell’arte (inv. 365/1-7); Moors and exotic figures, two of which are trick puppets (inv. 365/30-37 and 365/44); and three figures evoking the Middle Ages, for instance a Crusader (inv. 365/26), a Devil with goat feet (inv. 365/38) an incomplete Devil (365/45), and a Fool (inv. 365/41).

With the exception of a trick puppet with movable eyes (inv. 365/49) and the animals mentioned above, all these figures have a wooden head with a hook on top. A rod, or wire, was attached to this hook so that the marionette could be operated from above. The arms are articulated at the shoulder and elbow, and end with lead or wooden hands, to which strings are attached. The legs, one of which is shorter to enable the step-in movement of the figure, are articulated as well. The leaded feet are counterweights.

VENETIAN MARIONETTE THEATRES MENTIONED IN THE SOURCES

According to Cicogna the marionette theatre of the Grimani ai Servi family was not the only one that existed in Venice in the eighteenth century. Others were housed in Ca’ Contarini a San Barnaba, Ca’ Loredan a San Vio, Ca’ Carminati a San Lio and other patrician palaces of the Serenissima. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

The poet Berto Barbarani (1872-1945) wrote an article about the eighteenth-century marionette theatre that still was in Ca’ Mocenigo a San Bartolomio in the early-

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8 All these figures have been catalogued and published with short descriptions and photograph by P. Bonato in “Commedianti figurati”. Marionette nell’opera veneziana del Settecento’, Bollettino dei Musei Civici Veneziani, III series, no. 5.2010, ‘catalogo delle opere’, 13-32.

twentieth century.10 This little theatre had two painted backdrops offering insights into a Venetian house: a kitchen with a fireplace, and a sitting room with mirrors, furnishing, and a spinet. The proscenium supported eight shell-shaped lamp covers like the ones visible in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, and the apex of the proscenium arch was decorated with a relief depicting Harlequin kissing Columbine.

In 1933 an Italian magic lantern and a Venetian marionette theatre appeared on the antique market in Paris (Fig. 55). In the auction catalogue of the sale the marionette theatre is described as a ‘marionette theatre made of wood, painted and decorated with gilt reliefs depicting vases with flowers, arabesques, decorative elements, masks and a coat of arms in the upper part. It is equipped with props, marionettes, costumes, and its old series of [eight] oil lamps’.11 From the black and white photograph illustrating the lot described above, we can see that the scenery of this theatre offered a linear perspective view of Piazza San Marco and the western façade of the basilica. A note in the catalogue reports that this marionette theatre came from the ‘Palais Carminati à Venise’. This information is inconsistent with the coat of arms visible in the picture, which can be tentatively identified as that of the Cavalli family (sable charged with chevron or), but it is possible that the theatre had passed from this Venetian family to the Carminati.12 As we can read in the Parisian auction catalogue, the theatre in question belonged to the collection of the ‘Countess S[ophua] Antokolsky’, daughter of the Russian-Jewish sculptor Mark Antokolsky, and wife of Count Carlo Sforza, foreign minister of Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy.

11 Théâtre de marionettes en bois sculpté peint et doré à décor de vases fleuris, rinceaux, attributs, mascarons et à la partie supérieure d’un miroir et d’une armoiries. Il est accompagné de décors, marionettes, costumes, et de sa vieille rampe de quinquets. Commissaire Priseur Maître E. Ader, Objets d’Art et d’Ameublement principalement du XVIII Siècle (Paris, Hotel Drouot, 16-17 November 1933), lots 84 (Petit théâtre d’optique) and 85 (Théâtre de marionnettes).
12 This coat of arms of the Cavalli family is reproduced in V. Coronelli, Libri d’Oro, Armi e Blasoni dei Patrizi Veneti (Venice, 1694); and N. Orsini de Marzo (ed.), Stemmario Veneziano [1554-1556] (Milan, 2007).
In an article published on 28 February 1925 in *Il Gazzettino*, mention is made of two unidentified Venetian marionette theatres that had appeared on the antique market by that time. First and foremost however, the author of this article commented on the recent sale of a marionette theatre dating to the first half of the eighteenth century that ‘had been shipped from a Venetian palace to London’, where it was purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum.13

**THE MARIONETTE THEATRE FROM THE SALAMONI FAMILY**

The marionette theatre mentioned in *Il Gazzettino* had been put on sale in London in 1923 by Francis Harper.14 In 1925 it became the property of the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. W.31-1924).15 Today its centre stage is on permanent display at the V&A Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, whilst its two side doorways onto the backstage are in storage (Fig. 56). As we can see from the pillar sides of its centre stage, this 13 feet high theatre framework was repainted several times. Cross section microscope analysis of the paint substrate, which is composed of nine distempered layers, allowed the conservators of the museum to establish the original colours of the theatre, which were blue and cream with bole gilt décor (and mirrors on top of the side panels) as it appears today (Fig. 56a). This theatre retains its proscenium footlights composed of ten lamps (Fig. 56b). It is equipped with props, including four chairs, a table, a smaller table, two mirrors, and a spinet, and two scenes painted on a reversible wood panel. The scenery on one side shows the interior of a Venetian house with card playing figures, whilst the other side is a perspective view of Piazza San Marco. The decorative

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14 *The Times*, 8 April 1923.

scheme of the theatre, and also the style and construction of its accessory materials, suggest it dates from around 1734.

A note on file in V&A Museum of Childhood regarding the provenance of this theatre reads ‘possibly from the Carminati palace’. As with the Venetian marionette theatre sold in Paris in 1933, the catalogued provenance suggested for this theatre is inconsistent with the coat of arms visible on top of its proscenium arch (Fig. 56c). Surmounted by the gemmed coronet of the Venetian nobility, this heraldic shield is party per fess.\textsuperscript{16} The higher fess, bearing the arms of the Dominican order, is \textit{sable} with a pile reversed throughout \textit{argent} charged with the iconographic attributes of Saint Dominic – a dog with a torch in its jaws, a coronet with a lily stem and a palm branch, and an eight-point star \textit{argent}. While the colour combination symbolises the black and white garments of the Dominicans, the dog alludes to the vision of Saint Dominic’s barren mother, who dreamt that a dog leapt from her womb carrying a torch in its mouth, and seemed to set the earth on fire. The lily symbolises victory, and the palm of martyrdom. The star is the one that Dominic’s nurse saw on his forehead while he was being baptised. The lower fess of the escutcheon has fusils \textit{argent} and \textit{gules} in bend sinister.\textsuperscript{17} Fusilly heraldic shields are fairly uncommon in Venice, and the one with these tinctures corresponds to the arms of the Salomoni, one of the twenty-four families of the old Venetian nobility. They boasted among their ancestors the Blessed Giacomo Salamoni (Venice, 1231 – Forlì, 1314), a Dominican priest called the ‘father of the poor’ in Forlì, the city where he lived from 1269 until his death in the convent of San Giacomo Apostolo.\textsuperscript{18} His cult was approved in 1526 in Forlì, but not in Venice until 1617. This is

\textsuperscript{16} For heraldic terms see J. Parker, \textit{A Glossary of Terms Used in Heraldry} (London, 1834).
\textsuperscript{17} For heraldic terms refer to J. Parker, \textit{A Glossary of Terms used in Heraldry} (London, 1894). Online version: http://www.heraldsnet.org/saitou/parker/index.htm.
probably the reason why a party per fess shield with the arms of the Dominican order and the Salomoni family cannot be found either in the *Stemmaio Veneziano* (1554-1556) or later armorial codices based on medieval and Renaissance sources.19

The coat of arms illustrated above therefore suggests that the marionette theatre in the V&A Museum of Childhood formerly belonged to the Salamoni palace. If it was truly shipped to London from a noble palace of Venice, as reported in *Il Gazzettino* on 28 February 1925, we can reasonably think that it was housed in Palazzo Salamoni in Cannareggio, which was restored in 2008. Another option, although less probable, is that the marionette theatre was in the nunnery annexed to the church of Santa Marta, of which the Salamoni held the right of patronage (*jus patronatus*).20 Puppet theatre had been performed above all in Benedictine convents of Europe since the Middle Ages, and is documented in eighteenth-century Venice.21 Since the sixteenth century, however, the Convent of Santa Marta had been given to Augustinians nuns, whose cloistered life was quiet compared to that of their predecessors, the Benedictine nuns from the lagoon island of San Lorenz in Ammiana, and those in the convent of San Zaccaria.

It should also be noted that the convent of Santa Marta was located in the *sestiere* of Dorsoduro, mainly inhabited by fishermen and working class citizens. A luxurious marionette theatre like the one under examination here, therefore, would have clashed not only with the sobriety required for an Augustinian convent, but also with the economic conditions of its neighbourhood. In the *sestiere* of Cannareggio, instead, and in a private palace, it would have rivalled the marionette theatre of the Labia family in the parish of San Girolamo, which will be discussed in more detail later.


21 See Chapter VII.
It is possible that the nuns of the Convent of Santa Marta, who offered a silk rose to the Salomoni family as a symbolic tribute to their patronage every year, played a role in the making of the marionettes for the Salamon family. Some of them show an outstanding artistry as they are enriched with lace, embroidery, and silk flowers: such exquisite work could have been executed by the nuns, as confectionery, embroidery, and lace-making were frequently carried out in convents across Europe. Venice was no exception.22

The marionette theatre at the V&A Museum of Childhood houses twelve marionettes. They are 56 cm high, and are therefore slightly larger than slightly earlier examples measuring about 30 cm in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, the Davia Bargellini Museum, and the Musées Gadagne.23 The puppets housed in London have articulated arms with lead hands attached to strings, and legs with no strings as the articulated feet are counterweighted with lead soles. A wire is attached to the hook on top of the head and connected to a turnip control, which has to be handled with both hands. The construction of these marionettes is elaborate, as is their clothing.

Worthy of particular interest is the pair made up of an Old Lady and Old Man, whose silk costumes are beautifully decorated with painterly stitch embroidery in silk (Figs. 57 and 58). Also finely crafted is the pair which comprises a Young Man wearing a light-blue silk frock coat, waistcoat embroidered with gold and silver, silk breeches and stockings, and shoes with buckles, and Young Lady wearing a silk robe decorated with lace and silk flower bouquets (Figs. 59 and 60). To be fully appreciated, the costumes of these figures had to be seen from a short distance, as happened in domestic theatres.

A little less precious, but highly iconic for their masks and traditional costumes, are the characters of Pantalon (Fig. 62), whose shirt collar is enriched with lace, and the

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22 Molmenti (1889), I, 86.
23 Other small marionettes dating between the late seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century survive in the Borromeo Palace in Isola Madre, Lake Maggiore, and in the Maria Signorelli Collection, Rome.
zanni Brighella and Harlequin (Fig. 61), whose costumes are made of felt. Puppets of this kind could have been used in London by the Italian puppeteer Carlo Perico, whose fantoccini impersonating characters of the commedia dell’arte animated a little theatre open to a paying audience in Panton Street, Haymarket, during the 1770s.25

THE MARIONETTE THEATRE OF THE LABIA FAMILY

In the parish of San Girolamo in of Cannareggio, not very far from Palazzo Salamoni, the Teatro di San Girolamo was built in the palace of Angelo Maria Labia (1709-1775), a patron of the arts and author of satirical poems. His theatre was a miniature replica of the magnificent Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo of the Grimani family designed by Tommaso Bezzi, which had been unveiled in 1678.26 This opera playhouse is shown in a famous engraving of 1709, and in the Ball at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo in Honour of the Duke of York (1764) by an anonymous Venetian author (Fig. 51).

According to Groppo, ‘the backdrops and scenic devices of this little theatre were moved by means of machines and wheel gears in the same way as in the major theatres, and the figures were controlled without disclosing the artifice of their system of motion’.27 Not by chance in the miniature libretto of the puppet opera that was staged during carnival in 1746, the newly unveiled Teatro di San Girolamo was designated as a teatro di bambocci. The Italian word bambocci had the same significance as the French bamboches, and was in use since at least the seventeenth century. Its significance was explained by Martello in his proemio to the Starnuto di Ercole, published in 1723, as

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24 The other puppets of the ensemble that came with this marionette theatre are Columbine, the Lover, the Manservant, the Doctor, and the Captain (inv. nos 31.L-1924 – 31.Y-1924).
25 Perico’s marionette shows are frequently advertised in the London Press. An announcement with details about his Harlequin’s Villain, Sheriff, Judge, and Hangman is advertised in the Daily Advertiser 14 December 1770.
26 See Mangini (1974), 127-129.
27 Groppo (1745).
‘wooden puppets constructed in such a way that they can twist, move, and juggle when they are handled either from above with threads or from below with springs’.28

From the 1746 miniature libretto (24°) of Lo starnuto d’Ercole (The Sneeze of Hercules), adapted from Pier Jacopo Martello’s bambocciata, we can infer that the ‘Nuovo’ Teatro di San Girolamo was inaugurated with this première in the presence of the ‘patricians of Bavaria’ to whom the puppet opera was dedicated.29 The performance was held on the Sunday evening of Pentecost (29 May) with music adapted by Andrea Adolfati from a composition of Johan Adolf Hasse (1699-1783). The costumes for the figures were made by Natale Canziani, and the scenes were designed by Tomaso Cassani. These details about the artists who realised the visual part of the shows in the Labia marionette theatre have been overlooked by puppet theatre scholars perhaps because the name of the scene designer, Tomaso Cassani Bugoni, is reported including only his first surname (Cassani).

Before realising the settings for the Teatro San Girolamo, this Venetian painter had illustrated Giangirolamo Zannichelli’s botanical book, published in 1735.30 He had also worked as scene designer in operatic productions in Venice. Along with the name of Natale Canciani as costume designer, his name appears in the libretto of La ninfa Apollo, a popular pastoral staged in 1734 at the Teatro San Samuele of the Grimani family.31 In 1751 he would design the scenes for Griselda, a dramma per musica with lyrics by Apostolo Zeno and music by Gaetano Latilla performed in the Teatro San Cassiano of the Tron Family.32 As a painter Cassani Bugoni executed wood panels and

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31 G. Boldini (after F. Lemene), La ninfa Apollo, del conte Lemene, favola pastorale... (Marino Rossetti: Venice, 1734). Music by B. Galuppi.
32 A. Zeno, Griselda. (Venice, 1751).
frescoes for different churches and confraternities of Venice, which are listed in Zanetti’s compendium.\textsuperscript{33} Between 1659 and 1661 he would paint a cycle of six grisailles illustrating episodes from the life of the saint to whom the oratory was dedicated (Figs. 52 and 53).\textsuperscript{34} In these frescoes Cassani Bugoni’s style appears to be a little naïve, perhaps because they were meant to stir imagination in the pupils who were educated in music in this religious setting, whose history entwines with drama. Since 1671 the Congregazione dell’Oratorio di San Filippo Neri had performed\textit{sacre rappresentazioni} every year on 26 May to celebrate their patron saint, and on other feast days, for instance the Visitation (2 July) and Assumption (15 August).\textsuperscript{35} Cassani Bugoni’s scenery for the Teatro di San Girolamo probably anticipated, in terms of style, his representation of episodes from the ‘Life of Saint Philip Neri’, a saint who was known as ‘the father of joy’ or ‘God’s juggler’\textsuperscript{36}

On 29 June 1746, during the\textit{fiera delle bagatelle}, another puppet opera with music adapted from Hasse, \textit{Eurimedonte e Timocleone, ovvero i rivali delusi} (Eufymedon and Themistocles, or the Deluded Rivals) by Girolamo Zanetti was performed in the Teatro San Girolamo with music by Adolf Hasse. In the libretto, acknowledgement is made to Tommaso Cassani as author of the scenery, and Natale Canziani as costume maker. The show, dedicated to the ‘King of the Lapps’ was preceded by a\textit{cantata} in honour of the birthday of Maria Teresa Cybo d'Este, Duchess

\textsuperscript{33} A. M. Zanetti,\textit{Della Pittura Veneziana libri cinque} (Giambattista Albrizzi: Venice, 1771), 483-484 and 591.
\textsuperscript{35} These sacred representations are documented in manuscripts preserved in the archive of the church of Santa Maria della Fava. An index has been published by Arnold (1986). See also F. Danieli, \textit{San Filippo Neri. La nascita dell'Oratorio e lo sviluppo dell'arte cristiana al tempo della riforma} (Silivana Editoriale: Cinisello Balsamo, 2009).
of Massa and Carrara, and hereditary princess of Modena. As we can read in the libretto, the puppets/characters were given pseudonyms, surnames such as Bamboccio, Pua, Statuina, Burattini, Figurina, Ordigini, and Piavolo, each alluding to their construction. This particular element reveals that different puppet theatre traditions were at least known, if not practiced, in Venice. No balls were envisaged in this performance, which ended with an optical effect and a motion that could be obtained through a magic lantern: the spectators saw a ‘Magnificent and Majestic Courtyard with an opening overlooking the Royal Gardens. And in the distance a rainbow, which disappears, and then the whole scene turns into the realm of Flora’.38

In carnival 1747 Il Cajetto by Antonio Gori was performed with music by Ferdinando Bertoni.39 As in the previous year the costumes were made by Natale Canziani, and the scenes were designed once again by Tomaso Cassani. Being facetiously dedicated to ‘Madam Grammar’, this puppet opera could be addressed principally to a younger audience perhaps by the initiative of Angelo Maria Labia’s brother, Abbot Paolo Antonio Labia.

Eleanor Selfridge-Field believes that this and other puppet operas performed at Ca’ Labia Teatro di San Girolamo were staged for children for recreational and educational purposes.40 It seems more probable, however, that these costly shows were staged to entertain a mixed audience of educated guests with children in a domestic environment. Originally marionette opera had not been conceived as a spectacle for children, and would remain above all a genre addressed to adults in the Settecento,

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37 Selfridge-Field (2007), 622-625.
38 G. Zanetti, Eurimedonte e Timocleone ovvero I rivali delusi. Drama per musica da rappresentarsi nel nuovo famosissimo Teatro di S. Girolamo per la Fiera delle Bagatelle l’anno 1746 (L. Pavini, Venice, 1746).
39 A. Gori, Il Cajetto, drama per musica da rappresentarsi nel nuovo famosissimo Teatro di S. Girolamo nel carnovale dell’anno 1746 (L. Pavini: Venice, 1746).
40 Selfridge-Field (2007), 622-625.
although performances with puppets and music could be appealing to children as well, especially if they were mock operas.

An example of this kind is the *Didone Abbandonata (Dido Abandoned)*, a satirical work with text adapted anonymously from Pietro Metastasio and music by Andrea Adolfati, which was staged in 1747 during carnival. The libretto stated that again the costumes were made by Natale Canziani, and the scenes were ‘invented and directed’ by Tomaso Cassani. The use of a miniature *machina del fuoco* (an example is extant in the Borromeo Marionette Theatre), and perhaps also of optic devices at the end of the show can be inferred from the description of the last scene: ‘A perspective view of the Royal Palace of Carthage, which is set on fire, and gradually the whole fire turns into the temple of Venus, who descends from above’.41

In 1748, still during carnival, *Didone Abbandonata* by Apostolo Zeno was performed again with music by Fernando Bertoni. The novelty of the 1748 winter season in this marionette theatre was *Gianguir (Jahanghir)*, staged with lyrics adapted from a work of Apostolo Zeno and music by Geminiano Giacomello.42 In the libretto an acknowledgement is made to the costume maker, Natale Canziani, but there is no mention of the scene designer. The absence of Tomaso Cassani Bugoni perhaps is the reason why *Gianguir* ended with neither motions nor optic effects. The descriptions of the scenery, *machine*, and optical effects that were used in the marionette operas that were performed in the Teatro San Girolamo are given in Table 2 along with other details.

According to Groppo, the last two puppet operas to be staged in this domestic theatre were performed by ‘singers who were far better than those hired at the San Cassiano and San Moisè theatres’.43 Angelo Maria Labia must have spent a fortune on his Teatro

43 Groppo (1745), 290.
di San Girolamo, which appears to have had no equal amongst the noble palaces of Settecento Venice. To run it at its best, not only did he hire composers, musicians, and singers who worked in public opera houses, but also renowned stage and costume designers. His endeavour, rather than being aimed at making an income, was directed toward achieving social prestige through artistic patronage.

Interestingly, aside from attracting illustrious guests, Labia’s marionette theatre catalysed a process of recreation of art and nature in a setting that was at the same time a playhouse and a cabinet of curiosities. Through this process, which entails objectification, the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo became the little Teatro San Girolamo, the performers became marionettes, and narrative materialised in tiny libretti. This way the visible and invisible artistic achievements became miniatures, and miniatures were sought-after collectibles in Baroque Europe, where new inventions circulated through the system of courts.

A novelty of the eighteenth century was the miniature theatre consisting of a display box in which printed cards were inserted to create perspective views. An example of these cards is the series printed by Martin Engelbrecht (1684-1756) and his brother Christian from Augsburg in 1730. Entertaining miniature theatres of this kind, however, do not belong to the sphere of theatrical arts, but merely to the world of collecting. Eighteenth-century miniature theatres with mechanical and optic devices also were collectibles, and yet derived from the sixteenth-century mondo nuovo. These perspective boxes had opened the way to the magic lanterns and miniature theatres with the indirectly controlled figures of the Baroque age.

A remarkable yet little-known collection of forty-four miniature theatres from different parts of Europe and dating from different periods is preserved in the Civic

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44 These cards are preserved in Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, Italian Theatre Prints, P980004.
Museum of Orisei, Sardinia. This gathering formerly belonged to last Baron of Orisei, Don Giovanni Guiso di Orisei (d. 2006), who bequeathed it to that city. The majority of the little theatres in the collection are made of wood and measure nearly 50 cm in height by 60 cm in length and 40 cm in depth. These are the dimensions of the Venetian miniature dating from around 1730 that can be seen at Orosei. It is a gilt wooden theatre with a handle-controlled mechanism which drives the movement of two iron figures, Harlequin and Columbine (Fig. 89).

Magic lanterns, which in French are called petits théâtres d’optique, became extremely popular in Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. Although their invention is generally credited to the Dutch engineer Christiaan Huygens in the late-1650s, an early projection device had been invented by the Venetian engineer Giovanni Fontana in the fifteenth century. His device evidently found application in the shows offered by street players at that time, and in the later operatic productions with lighting effects. An Italian magic lantern whose location is currently unknown accompanied the eighteenth-century Venetian marionette theatre that was sold in Paris in 1933. This lost piece could be similar to the eighteenth-century magic lantern with hand-painted glass slides from the Minici Zotti Collection in Padua, Museo del Pre-cinema. Perhaps slightly later was the magic lantern complete with slides that belonged to the famous opera singer Gaetano Guadagni (Lodi or Vicenza, 1728 – Padua, 1792). This kind of device made use of light and lenses to project images, and could be equipped with accessories used to obtain dynamic effects.

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45 Carrone, ed. (2000).
47 See Chapter II, and the mondo novo in Chapter VII.
THE MARIONETTE THEATRE OF GAETANO GUADAGNI IN PADUA

In her recent monograph of 2014, Patricia Howard has brought to scholarly attention the inventory of the goods owned by the castrato singer Gaetano Guadagni in his house in Padua, where he lived from 1771 to 1792. These included a magic lantern and a marionette theatre.

It is possible that Guadagni developed a passion for puppet opera as he saw the performances at the Teatro San Girolamo in Palazzo Labia from 1746 to 1748. Guadagni was in Venice at that time: he entered the choir in the basilica of Sant’Antonio in Padua in 1746, and on 5 October 1746 he obtained permission to sing in Venice that autumn, and also in the subsequent carnival. In February 1747 he was suspended from service in Padua and, according to Howard, it seems probable that he had either obtained or tried to obtain an opera engagement in Venice also for the 1747/48 season. No records allow us to know whether he was hired by Angelo Maria Labia, but we cannot exclude this possibility. From 1748 he started building his career in London and Vienna, and after performing in major theatres across Europe he returned to the Veneto in 1765. Once settled back in Padua, he performed in this city and Venice until 1785, when he was partially silenced by a stroke.

From various sources we know Guadagni used to perform puppet opera for friends and guests when he was in Padua. The first account of these performances is provided by the Irish tenor Michael Kelly, who visited Guadagni in 1782, and reported that:

He had built a house, or rather a palace, in which he had a very neat theatre, and a company of puppets, which represented Orfeo e Euridice: himself singing the part of Orpheo behind the scenes. It was in this character, and in singing Gluck’s beautiful rondò in it, ‘Che farò senza

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50 Ibid., 20-23.
Euridice’, that he distinguished himself in every theatre in Europe, and drew such immense houses in London. His puppet-show was his hobby-horse, and as he received no money, he had always crowded houses.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1784 Lord Mount Edgcumbe also visited Guadagni in Padua, and observed that he was now advanced in years, and sung as \textit{contralto}: his voice was still full and well-toned, and his style appeared to me excellent. [...] he insisted on my taking coffee at his house, where he entertained me not with singing, which I should have liked much better, but exhibiting \textit{fantocciini} on a little stage, in which he took great delight.\textsuperscript{52}

Both the memoirs of Lord Mount Edgcumbe and Michael Kelly relate that Guadagni was really fond of puppets, and that his commitment to performing opera behind the scenes was not a makeshift solution of an aged singer in need, but the pastime of a performer whose voice and appearance were still beautiful. Aside from testifying to the favourable reception of these shows, Kelly observed that Guadagni staged them in different houses, implying that his marionette theatre could be moved with reasonable effort from one palace to another.

Concerning the music of the puppet opera that Kelly saw in Padua, Howard observed that it is impossible to know if Guadagni sang Gluck’s original score or an adaptation, considering also that Gluck himself remarked: ‘Non ci vuol nulla, per che la mia Aria “Che farò senza Euridice” mutando solamente qualche cosa nella maniera dell’espressione, diventi un saltarello da Burattini’ (Nothing but a change in the mode of expression is needed to turn my \textit{aria} ‘Che farò senza Euridice’ into a dance for marionettes).\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{53} Gluck to the Duke of Braganza, 10 October 1770 (Preface to Paride ed Elena, Vienna, 1770). in Howard (2014) 177.
Still according to Howard different options were possible, including Gluck’s original score (Vienna, Burgtheater, 1761), J.C. Bach and Guglielmi’s adaptation with Bottarelli’s changes to the lyrics (London, King’s Theatre, 1770), Bertoni’s version (Venice, Teatro San Benedetto, Summer 1776), or an undated adaptation of Gluck, Bacch, and Guglielmi’s score that Guadagni had made between 1775 and 1784 for a private performance in Padua.54

The three libretti that document Guadagni’s performances of the Orfeo ed Euridice in Padua date to 2 May 1776, 5 July 1778, and 17 May 1784.55 Although none of them corresponds exactly to Guadagni’s adapted score, at least one of them is believed to have been sung with his music.56 The same consideration can be made for their staging as a puppet opera. The 1784 libretto includes an erudite prologue that has tentatively been interpreted as a memorial dedication to a dead patron, and therefore its performance with puppets appears to be the least probable.57 The 1776 and 1778 libretti, with minor textual differences from one another, were printed for performances to be held in Padua at an unspecified Accademia, a context in which performances with figures had been staged since the early-seventeenth century.58

In an attempt to find out similarities and differences between the Orfeo ed Euridice staged with acting singers and the same opera staged with puppets, the libretto of the representation held in Venice at the Teatro San Benedetto in 1776 has been compared with the libretto of the representation staged at the unspecified Accademia of Padua that same year, presumably with puppets. In both cases the author of the libretto is

54 This last score is preserved in Padua, Biblioteca Antoniana (Archivio Musicale D.IV.1624). Discussed in Howard (2014), ‘Guadagni the Composer’, 137-154.
55 F. Bertoni, Orfeo ed Euridice. Azione teatrale per musica... (Conzatti: Padua, 1776); F. Bertoni, Orfeo ed Euridice. Azione teatrale per musica... (Ramanzini: Venice, 1778); and F. Bertoni, Orfeo ed Euridice (Padua, 1784). The only copy extant is in Padua, Museo Civico, 1-Pei, BP III 377.
58 See Chapter III.
Ferdinando Bertoni (1725-1813), known above all for being a composer of opera seria and organist at San Marco, and yet he had composed the music for two puppet operas, Didone Abbandonata and Il Cajetto, staged at Ca’ Labia in the Teatro San Girolamo.

The first difference to be noticed between the two libretti lies in the subtitle of the opera, which is defined as dramma per musica in the Venetian libretto and azione teatrale in the Paduan one, implying that in the last case more emphasis was placed on scenic spectacle.

The second difference, which is significant, is the composition of the cast. In the Venetian libretto only three ‘actors’ are listed, Orfeo (Guadagni), Euridice (Anna Zamperini), and Imene (Giuseppe Cupola), while in the Paduan libretto the three protagonists, all male singers, are Orfeo (Guadagni), Euridice (Lorenzo Piatti), and Amore (Antonio Nazzolini). No doubt the character of Amore (Love) would be much easier to represent with an iconic figure, in this case Cupid, than Imene (Hymen). Two more ‘actors’ appear in the Paduan libretto: Ombra (Shadow), and Plutone (Pluto). In the copy of the libretto preserved in Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, the names of the performers, Giambattista Ambrogi and Giovanni Battista Pennacchio, were crossed out with pen marks, possibly because Ombra and Plutone do not sing in Orfeo ed Euridice, and only appear before scene III and scene IV. It is easy to imagine that a shadow puppet could be used to represent Ombra, moving it behind the two gauze drops listed as equipment of the theatre framework belonging to Guadagni.\textsuperscript{59} Rather, machina or a huge puppet could give shape to the god Pluto, as happened frequently in operatic productions.

The third and last difference lies in the presentation of the balls. Four balls are listed in the Venetian libretto, which also includes the names of the choreographer and the dancers. In the Paduan libretto neither the balls nor the dancers are listed. Instead,

\textsuperscript{59} Padua, Archivio di Stato di Padova, Notarile, F. Fanzago, Inventory of the Belongings of G. Guadagni, 23-37.
the choirs take the names of the balls. The execution of the same balls is indicated in the
scenes that include them, however. As for the secondary characters mentioned above, it
is possible that the balls were executed by figures, and this would explain why the
cancers are not presented in the Paduan libretto.

No significant difference can be found between the descriptions of the scenery,
which are set out in Table 3. From these descriptions we can infer that lighting
equipment, a machine producing dreadful sound to stir imagination of the underworld,
and a machine to create flame effects were used in both representations, obviously in a
different scale.

Examples of the aforementioned machines are extant in the Borromeo Palace in
Isola Madre, Lake Maggiore, whose marionette theatre will be discussed in more detail later. A machine to produce flame effects, a mechanism to produce waterfalls and sea waves, a machine transforming a tower into a whale, and a machine dissolving a prison into a delightful temple are listed in the inventory of Guadagni’s belongings, which also includes a description of the theatre framework, although its dimensions are not stated. The settings, whose characteristics can be found in Table 3, correspond to many of the scenes described in the libretti of puppet operas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Tables 1 and 2), and some of them match those described in the Paduan libretti of Orfeo ed Euridice (see Table 4). Indeed, Guadagni’s marionette theatre was well equipped, as it numbered 160 articulated puppets suitable for ‘comedy, tragedy, and opera’, and twelve animal puppets of unspecified breed amongst its stock.

Guadagni is not the only composer who brought puppets into the sphere of music. As will be discussed in more detail later, Haydn also owned a marionette theatre, which he used for rehearsals at Esterhaza. The same could have happened in other contexts where puppet operas were performed on a regular basis in domestic theatres.
Venice’s Legacy in Lombardy and the Papal State

Following the Venetian fashion, noble families residing in different parts of Northern Italy had marionette theatres set up in their palaces to host performances for family and friends. Since the fifteenth century, when Bergamo and Brescia became part of the Venetian Republic, the cultural dialogue between the Serenissima and Lombardy had gained momentum. Furthermore, as Bergamo is on the old route from Lombardy to the territory of the Po basin, the puppeteers from this area of the Papal State found an easier way to reach the Veneto and return to their home cities with new ideas and teachings from that region.

The Marionette Theatres of the Borromeo Family in Isola Madre, Lake Maggiore

As far as Lombardy is concerned, mention should be made of the marionette theatre and small theatre box at Palazzo Borromeo in Isola Madre, Lake Maggiore. The marionette theatre dates to the eighteenth century and used to be a theatre for live performers in the seventeenth century. The theatre box and its fourteen marionettes date from no later than 1690, as they are listed in an inventory of the palace made that year. Although most of the marionettes in the Borromeo Palace were made in Lombardy in the nineteenth century, this collection is extremely interesting because it survives in its original setting. Here, lighting equipment and miniature scenic machines which were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are also exhibited.

Other prestigious collections are extant in Milan, but the majority of their materials belonged to the permanent marionette theatres that were established in the

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60 R. Leydi, ‘Burattini e marionette nel XVIII secolo (Venezia e Bologna)’ in Leydi et al. (1985), 19-23.
61 Archivio Borromeo, Milan, Inventario di materiali vari presso l’Isola Bella, item no. 2619, 1690. in Gorla (1992), 27.
nineteenth century. The Borromeo Palace with its domestic theatres is therefore a unicum in Lombardy and an example of preservation of cultural heritage which finds very few parallels in Europe.

A small number of Venetian marionettes are permanently exhibited in Genoa, Museo Sant’Agostino, along with the theatre framework and other puppets of Lombard and Emilian traditions on loan to this museum. This collection belongs to the Museo Biblioteca dell’Attore in Genoa, to whom it was bequeathed by the Rissone family. Mirroring the absorption of Venice’s legacy in eighteenth-century Lombardy is one of the aforementioned Venetian marionettes, the Nobleman, set against a linear perspective scenery with a view of Milan’s cathedral, instead of the basilica of San Marco (Fig. 67).

THE MARIONETTE THEATRE OF THE ALBICINI FAMILY IN FORLÌ

Testifying to the cultural dialogue between Venice, Lombardy, Florence, Bologna and other cities of the Papal State is the marionette theatre in the Davia Bargellini Museum, Bologna (inv. 701). The theatre framework (154 cm x 224 cm) bears the coat of arms of the Albicini, the foremost noble family of Forlì. Possibly by way of inheritance, this theatre became the property of Count de Courten (Sierre, 1848 – Florence, 1904) and his son Lodovico, a painter active in Florence who sold it to the Venetian antiquarian Dino Barozzi. In 1922, together with a collection of eighteenth-century Venetian marionettes, the theatre was acquired by the Italian government, who assigned it to the Civic Museums of Bologna because the theatre framework and its painted backdrop with wings reflect the style of Francesco Galli Bibbiena (Bologna, 1659-1739). The

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63 For example, the collection of the BUMA (Museo Virtuale del Burattino) at the Scuola d’Arte Drammatica ‘Paolo Grassi’ and the collection of the Atelier Carlo Colla e Figli, Milan. Both are accessible to scholars by appointment.
64 R. Leydi et al. (1985).
setting is appropriate as documentary sources testify to puppet plays performed in the
domestic theatre of the Bargellini Palace.\textsuperscript{66} In 1929 the collection was enriched by Professor
Publio Podio’s bequest, which included five eighteenth-century settings, each including
a backdrop and with a pair of wings. Three of these settings were attributed to the circle
of Antonio Galli Bibbiena (Parma, 1697 – Milan, 1774).\textsuperscript{67} Other material bequeathed
includes a nineteenth-century scenery with four wings, and four pairs of spare wings.\textsuperscript{68}

The eighteenth-century Garden backdrop, which is not an angle-perspective
scene in the style of Bibbiena, is particularly interesting because it matches the
inventory description of a scenery in the marionette theatre of Gaetano Guadagni,
‘Elysian fields with three arches to create the perspective distance’ (Fig. 71).
Additionally, this backdrop gives an example of the same principle at the heart of
Engelbrecht’s cards for miniature theatres or dioramas being used in puppet theatre.

Unlike the theatre framework and most of its scenes, the marionettes in the
Davia Bargellini Museum are Venetian. Their date of origin in some cases is difficult to
establish, but certainly falls within the 1690-1730 period. The collection includes
seventy-four string puppets that are human simulacra (thirty-two of which are
exhibited), eleven horses, and one monkey. There are noblemen and ladies with wax
hair, menservants and maidens, characters of the commedia dell’arte such as a
Harlequin with movable mouth, a crowned king with Oriental features, Mongols with
pointed hats, an automata, and a trick puppet turning a lady into a dwarf. Their
construction is analogous to that of the marionettes in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, but in
some cases the feet have lead soles like the marionettes in the V&A Museum of

\textsuperscript{66} C. Ricci, \textit{I teatri di Bologna nei secoli XVII e XVIII} (L. Pasqualucci, Bologna), 248 and 406.
\textsuperscript{67} The settings attributed to the circle of Bibbiena are the \textit{Magnificent Atrium} (inv. 1551 and 1552-53),
the \textit{Courtyard of a Palace} (inv. 1556 and 1557-58), and the \textit{Pavillion with a Fountain} (inv. 1566 and
1567-68). The other two are the Garden (inv. 1571 and 1572-73), and the Hall (inv. 1561 and 1562-63).
\textsuperscript{68} The nineteenth-century scenery and its four wings depict the \textit{Hall of Mirrors and Paintings} (inv. nos.
1588-1592).
Childhood, whose costumes with exquisite embroidery is unrivalled. The marionettes in the Davia Bargellini Museum also, however, show an outstanding level of artistry and originality. The costumes are perfectly tailored, and often adorned with lace, beads, trimming, and metal sequins. The size of these marionettes ranges from 27 cm to 37 cm in height, with the exception of two giant Genii with turbans (Fig. 70).

**Venice’s Legacy in the Habsburg Domains**

A figure like the Genii in the Davia Bargellini museum could have been used in 1727 by Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) to represent Hercules in the world of Pygmies when he performed Martello’s *Starnuto di Ercole* with marionettes in the palace of Count Francesco Antonio Lantieri in Wippach, Slovenia. This episode is well known, as the Venetian playwright wrote in his *Memoirs* that ‘to procure amusement to me he [Lantieri] caused a marionette theatre, which was almost abandoned, and which was very rich in figures and decorations, to be refitted’. In his recollections Goldoni also explained that Martello’s *bambocciata* in verses was suitable to be represented with puppets, because:

- there is a plan, a progression, an intrigue, a catastrophe, and a conclusion;
- the style is good and well supported; the thoughts and sentiments are all proportionate to the size of the personages. Even the verses are short, and everything indicates pigmies. A gigantic puppet was requisite for Hercules; everything was well executed.

These observations praise the ideal match between the tight rhythm of Martello’s verses and the quick movement of the protagonists, which presumably were string puppets with counterweights. It should be noted that the idea of using a giant puppet to

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70 Goldoni (1783), 76-77.
impersonate Hercules was Goldoni’s idea, as the author of the play had given different stage directions, specifying that:

[the puppeteers] shall speak with a swazzle to adapt their voices to the size of the statuettes. Hercules shall not appear, but only speak from outside the scene with baritone voice, filling his discourses with fourteen syllable verses and high-sounding words. Eventually, just a finger or the head may show up. In that case the puppeteers shall make the eyes roll, and the mouth open and close in synchrony with speech, performing movement with which they are familiar.\(^71\)

Whether staging a giant head or a giant puppet, the play exploits scale difference between figures – a practice that has been used in puppet theatre ever since. Indeed, Goldoni was familiar with puppetry: in his Memoirs he recalls that his father entertained him with a theatre box, which he managed himself with the assistance of three or four of his friends in the loggia of Ca’ Centani, near the ponte dei nomboli.\(^72\) Today, that palace houses the Ca’ Goldoni Museum and Library.

Goldoni concluded the account of his performance with puppets in the theatre of Count Lantieri saying ‘I could lay a bet that I am the only person who ever thought of executing the bambocciata by Martelli’.\(^73\) Perhaps by the time he was recollecting his memories the Venetian playwright did not remember that Angelo Maria Labia sponsored the staging of The Sneeze of Hercules in 1746, although in that occasion Hercules did not appear on the scene of the Teatro San Girolamo, but only showed off a hand.\(^74\) And yet Goldoni would long remember the puppet theatre set up in the loggia of his own

\(^71\) Martello (1724), V, 241.
\(^72\) Goldoni (1783), 37.
\(^73\) Ibid., p. 77
\(^74\) A stage direction in the libretto indicates that Hercules speaks from behind the scene ‘mettendo fuori una mano’ (showing out a hand), Martello (1724), 63.
childhood home, seeing it as the means ‘through which destiny, wishing to involve me in theatre, started from that moment to cast its seeds into my heart and imagination’. 75

Although Goldoni never wrote puppet plays, his libretto *Il mondo della luna (The World of the Moon)* would amass a great fortune in puppet theatre during the nineteenth century. 76 This *dramma giocoso* features a deceiving astrologer who helps the daughters of a nobleman to convince their father that he has been brought to the world of the moon, where women are allowed to choose their husbands. The plot can be rendered well in puppet theatre, because its inherent ‘opalisation’ effect playing with perception emphasises the continuous shift between reality and illusion, true and false. Premiered with music by Galuppi at the Teatro Giustinian in San Moisé during carnival 1750, *Il mondo della luna* was replicated several times in Venice throughout the eighteenth century. 77 On 3 August 1777 it debuted with music by Haydn at the opera house of Prince Esterhazy, whose marionette theatre will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

**THE MARIONETTE THEATRE OF PRINCE ESTERHAZY**

The pinnacles of artistic achievement reached in the theatres of Venetian patrons staging opera and puppet opera attracted élite audiences from across Europe. Additionally, Ottoboni’s theatre brought the allure of Venice to Rome, and was certainly known by the Hungarian prelates at the Colegium Germanicum Hungaricum who contributed to Hungary’s late Renaissance inspired by Italian art. Amongst these, the ‘more learned and updated in the sphere of art’ was Károly Esterházy (1725-1799), a member of one

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75 G. Goldoni, *Il ricco insidiato* dedicatory epistle (Venice, 1758). This play is written in Martellian verse, the metric form used is one originated by Pier Iacopo Martello.
76 Perhaps the more famous adaptations the one staged with marionettes by V. Podrecca at the Teatro Stabile del Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trieste, in 1983 and 1992. In September 2012, with the same marionettes, S. Della Polla and C. Furlan staged Goldoni’s *Il Mondo della Luna* by C. with music by J. Haydn at the Museo Teatrale Schmidl, Trieste.
of the wealthiest families of the Hungarian aristocracy. The foremost exponent of this House was Prince Nikolaus ‘the magnificent’ (1714–1790), who is remembered for having transformed his castle at Fertőd (about 70 miles from Vienna), into ‘the little Versailles of Hungary’ named Esterháza. The architecture of this estate rather reminds us of that of Villa Contarini at Piazzola sul Brenta, and this is not the only analogy between the two residences and their patrons. As Marco Contarini had done in the late seventeenth century, Prince Nikolaus commissioned two theatres to be built at Esterháza, the opera house and the marionette theatre. The latter was set in a rococo hall, possibly inspired by the Grotto of Thetys at Versailles, as it was decorated with niches in the form of glittering *rocaille* with sculptures and frescoes.

A plan of the marionette theatre is also preserved in the National Archives of Hungary, Budapest. This plan is comparable to those of seventeenth-century theatres of Venice such as the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo, which needed space behind and under the stage for simultaneous scene changes employing Torelli’s chariot and pole system. This means that the marionette theatre at Esterháza was an expensive built-in structure. In fact, after a fire destroyed the opera house in 1779, the musicians sang in the marionette theatre, whose dimensions and equipment were evidently suitable. This episode sheds light on the dimensions of marionette theatres of aristocratic settings in the age of the Baroque, and validates the hypothesis that Ottoboni’s theatre designed by Juvarra could also have been used to stage operas with either figures or live performers (see Chapter IV).

Documentary evidence reveals that in 1772 Prince Nikolaus bought a ‘Marionetten-Theater’ for 300 ducats from the playwright Karl Michael von Pauersbach, based in Vienna, where the theatre framework and marionettes were made, presumably in

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Venetian style. In Vienna, near the Judenplatz, the puppeteer Pietro Resoniero (Vicenza, 1640 – Vienna, 1735) had established his semi-permanent marionette theatre and school for puppet-masters after having performed in Prague.79 A rare example of his marionettes, *Hamlet*, is preserved at the Puppet Museum in Budrio (Fig. 65).

The theatre framework and figures acquired by Prince Nikolaus for Esterháza would be completed with the work of stage designers, painters, carpenters, costumiers, and wig-makers, who were hired for the opera house and marionette theatre as well. Amongst these was the painter Johan Basilius Gründmann, to whom Pietro Travaglia was initially subordinate. Pupil of Bernardino and Fabrizio Galliari in Milan, Travaglia was chief designer of costume, scenery, and lighting at Esterháza from 1777 to 1798. Quite a number of his drawings are angle-perspective scenes in the Bibbiena style. Another artist active at Esterháza was the ‘architetto e pittore teatrale di S. M. Imperiale’ Alessio Cantini, who designed the scenes for two marionette operas by von Pauersbach, the satirical *Alceste* with music by Ordoñez (1775) and *Genovevens Vierter Theil* (1777), to which I shall return.

The marionette theatre at Esterhaza was completed in August 1773, in time for the state visit of the Empress Maria Theresa (1717-1780). The festival book printed to celebrate this event praises the lighting of the marionette theatre, and mentions the use of perspective scenes, one of which depicted the Esterháza’s palace and gardens.80 It also provides an account of the first marionette opera to be represented there, *Philemon und Baucis*, with music by Haydn, of which both the libretto and score survive. *Philemon und Baucis* is a fable of two gods, Jupiter and Mercury, who receive shelter from Philemon and Baucis when they travel to earth in disguise, and thus reward the

79 Purschke (1986), 71.
warm-hearted couple before they return to Olympus bringing back to life their son Aret and his beloved Narcisa. As the gods departed, the allegorical meaning of the representation was made explicit: the Hapsburg coat of arms was shown surrounded by figures symbolising glory, clemency, justice and valour, then Happiness clasped the imperial arms with one hand, and with the other showered Plenty from her cornucopia upon countless figures clothed with the traditional costumes of Hungary. As a conclusion to this happy ending Haydn himself shot three marzipan hens, which the Empress ate so that the refreshments could start.

Haydn was paid thirty ducats for his composition and for directing the orchestra, and the same amount was given to the painter Gründemann, whilst ten ducats were awarded to each of the five singers who performed. The singers belonged to Carl Wahr’s troupe, which had been hired since 1772 with a contract specifying that the singers were expected to ‘read roles’ at the marionette theatre when required, implying that they did not have to learn these parts. Unfortunately no contracts of this kind have been found in Venice. We may speculate that at least for the shows that were staged at the Teatro San Moisé, a public theatre, the singers learned their parts. Guadagni certainly knew the part of Orfeo, which he had sung so many times, and probably also the other roles as it appears that he moved his own puppets behind the scene.

Aside from the score of the Der Hexenshabbas (1773), whose authorship is uncertain as noted above, Haydn composed five scores for marionette operas with libretti by von Pauersbach. Of these, only the scores of Philemon und Baucis (1773), Die Feuerbrunst (1776) and Die bestraste Rachgier (1779) have survived, whilst those of Genovefens Vierter Theil (1774) and Dido (1776), are lost.81

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81 The only existing libretto of Der Hexenshabbas (1773) was found in the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar, in 2009.
The analysis of the scores and *libretti* also testify to the cultural dialogue between Venice and Vienna as far as puppet opera is concerned. *Die Feuerbrunst* is a *singspiel*-like *dramma buffo* in which music and language are used to mark the difference between Columbine, a Venetian character turned into an educated maiden who speaks literary German, and Hans Wurst (*Pulcinella*), a *zanni* who speaks the Viennese dialect with a strong accent.\(^\text{82}\) The contrast between different language styles and rhythms of speech generates a comic effect that had long been exploited by *commedia dell’arte* performers.\(^\text{83}\) In Venice, however, no characters of the *commedia dell’arte* appear either in operas or puppet operas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although these figures certainly played a role in marionette plays and *intermezzi*. A possible explanation for this difference is that Haydn’s works included dialogue instead of the *recitativo* between musical parts, and dialogue made it possible to exploit the hilarious sketches of the *commedia dell’arte*. Haydn also used other expedients to make his work more engaging. It has been observed that spectacular incidents such as the burning of Colombina’s house in *Die Feuerbrunst* or the storm in *Philemon und Baucis* elicited agitated minor-key music from Haydn of the type familiar to the many minor-key symphonies that he composed prior to these two operas.\(^\text{84}\) We can infer that Haydn was conscious of the correlation between speech, music, and visual representation, the harmony of which is the key to perfection in both Western and Eastern puppet theatre traditions.

Perfection could hardly be achieved without practice, even by masters such as Haydn. From a letter written by Prince Nikolaus from Vienna to his Chief Steward Rhier at Esterhäuser in March 1775, we know that Haydn himself possessed a small marionette theatre that he used to give performances with the musicians during Lent.

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\(^\text{82}\) Aztalos (2012), 131-153.
\(^\text{83}\) See Chapter II.
\(^\text{84}\) *Ibid.*
Besides offering an insight into musical life at Esterhaza during the Prince’s winter sojourn in Vienna, this letter suggests that Haydn may have maintained a small puppet theatre to be able to hold rehearsals with a simpler apparatus during winter, and so prepare for marionette operas to be performed at best in the main season at Esterhaza.85

One of Haydn’s most admired marionette operas was *Dido*, first staged at Esterháza in 1776 and replicated in Vienna in July 1777. This performance was commented upon in the *Almanac of Gotha* reporting that ‘a new marionette opera that débuted in the previous year at Esterháza and cost [the patron] 6000 florins, was so ‘splendid’ that the Empress wanted to see it. Therefore, a stage was erected at Shönbrunn and all the puppets and accessories were brought to Vienna’, where the representation was held in honour of Wenzel von Sachsen, Elector and Archbishop of Trier, a relative of the Empress Maria Theresa’s son-in-law.86 Following this event, Shönbrunn palace would have had its own marionette theatre.87

The apparatus and figures loaned were returned to Esterháza as quickly as possible, as *Genovefens Vierter Theil* was to be staged in August that same year during the celebrations for the marriage of Prince Nikolaus’ second son (Nikolaus Count Esterházy) to Maria Anna Franziska Weissenwolf. The *Almanac of Gotha* in September 1777 commented on this performance, describing that it had ‘countless scene changes’ and gorgeous backdrops depicting a festive banquet, an illuminated town, a library, and the infernal regions, all designed by Alessio Cantini, the ‘architect and theatre scenery painter of Her Majesty the Empress’.88

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86 Ibid., 111.
87 In Vienna, in one of the two antechambers of Empress Maria Theresa puppet shows were staged frequently to entertain her children. In March 1745, a month after the birth of the second son, Karl Joseph, to the empress and Francis Stephen, the first of several puppet plays for children was staged. See E. Grossegger, *Theater, Feste, und Feieren zur Zeit Maria Theresias, 1742-1776 nach den Tagenbucheintragungen des Fürsten Johann Joseph Khevenhüller-Metsch* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Vienna, 1987), 90. Cited in Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 622.
Representations of this kind required a lot of work behind the scenes, especially that of the Figurendirector, Herr Sikka, but also of machinists such as Albert Bienfait, ‘Pantomimenmeister’ of the French opéra comique in Vienna before he joined Esterháza (1774-1778). Moreover, the children and wives of the princely grenadiers were expected to help the machinists and the puppeteer. For the staging of Haydn’s Dido in 1777, for instance, ten rehearsals were required just for one performance. Such a large number of helpers might have been necessary to move the many puppets of the chorus, which was not composed of dumb figures sliding on rails at the sound of instrumental music, as happened with Acciaiuoli’s puppets. The marionettes used at Esterháza presumably were similar to the one by Pietro Resoniero in Budrio and Francesco Bernardon, both active in Vienna during the eighteenth century (Figs. 65 and 66). String-and-rod puppets with such an elaborate construction could execute complex movements, and thus were suitable for literary and operatic genres. Moreover, because of their dimensions, they could be seen by spectators from a distance such as those sitting in the back rows of a court theatre. The costumes of Prince Esterházy’s marionettes, however, presumably were lavish like the embroidered ones of the examples in the V&A Museum of Childhood (Figs. 57-60).

Puppet operas at Esterháza continued uninterruptedly from 1773 to 1779, staging at least eleven different works, of which we have evidence, again in the Almanac of Gotha (Alceste, Dido, Demophon, Genovephen, Der Hexensabbath, Philemon und Baucis, Die Fee Urgele, Die betraste Rachgier, oder das abgebrannte Haus).89 The decline of the marionette theatre commenced in 1779, when it lost his director (von Pauersbach), the Carl Wahr troupe that had made it famous (replaced by Divald’s troupe from 1780 to

1785 and Johan Mayer’s company from May 1785 to the 1790s), and even its original setting with the rococo grotto after a fire devastated the opera house and the theatre box was moved out to allow the opera singers to perform therein. Only one marionette opera was staged at Esterháza thereafter, *L’Assedio di Gibilterra* (1783).

At the death of Prince Nikolaus, in 1790, the curtain had already fallen on his marionette theatre. His successor dismissed without notice the last troupe engaged in the opera house. The singers were hired at the Imperial Court Theatre in Vienna, since Shöenbrunn had ceased to be the centre of the Habsburg’s court and political life.

The building once housing the marionette theatre of Prince Esterhazy was used for agricultural purposes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and sadly nothing of its original splendour remains.

**The Many Dawns and the Sunset of Puppet Opera**

In Rome, Paris, Venice, and lastly Vienna, puppet opera became a self-standing genre of the Baroque age, envisaging wondrous perspective scenes, finely crafted figures, and music. The latter no longer was an accompaniment to the representation, as happened in puppet plays staged in open-air spaces by itinerant performers, but rather a ‘language’ entwining with the other semiotic systems of puppet theatre. It was a spectacle conjoining the arts as music drove the synchronous movement of tiny sculptures giving shape to narrative whilst words were sung.

In all these contexts puppet operas were also held on festive occasions during Lent in domestic theatres, when balls and comedies were not permitted, or otherwise following the calendar of the theatrical season of public theatres. Winter was the main theatrical season in Vienna and Venice (starting in carnival); summer was the main season at Esterháza and Venice’s mainland on the river Brenta and in the outskirts of Padua, where noble families usually resided from June to September. This is not the
only ‘temporal’ difference between Venice and other contexts: the golden age of
operatic productions with figures, which lasted for about two years at the Théâtre du
Marais in seventeenth-century Paris and a few more years at Ottoboni’s theatre in early-
eighteenth-century Rome, had already declined in Venice when a new dawn started at
Esterháza in 1773. Yet, in the last decades of the eighteenth century the age of Baroque
was drawing to an end, as was one of its peculiar expressions, puppet opera.
Chapter VI

Venice and the East

From the early centuries of its history Venice was a place in which people from different countries and tongues were present. Some settled permanently in specific areas of the city and others resided only temporarily for trade or work. In this chapter, a pause for reflection within the chronological account presented in this dissertation, will shed light on the way in which identities from the near and far East were represented in puppet theatre in Venice at different times of its history. Moreover, attempts will be made to identify possible cross-fertilisation with puppet theatre traditions originating in the cultures with which the Venetians came in contact.

One of the first minorities to settle in Venice was the Jewish community, who obtained permission to stay in Venice permanently in 1385, although they had to cope with discriminating laws and restrictions. From 1516 the Jews were obliged to reside in the ghetto nuovo, but in 1541 the ghetto vecchio that they had left was inhabited by the Sephardic Jews from the Levant.1 Aside from the Jews, Sanudo mentioned the Armenians, Dalmatians (schiavoni), Persians, Turks, Moors, and other ethnicities in his Diarii, also noting that Zuan Polo was able to imitate their accents in mock plays. Using wordings like ‘vestito alla turchesca’ in his descriptions of the costumes worn by performers in mummeries or farces, Sanudo also revealed that most Venetians could identify the ‘foreigners’ by their clothing. The same assumption can be made leafing through the lists of robbe required to stage the commedia in the scenarii at the Museo Civico Correr, Venice.2

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For example ‘Jewish identification signs, wax candles, a dress for the Jewish bride’ and a slapstick to beat the Jews were needed to stage the *Nozze di ebrei* (*The Jewish Marriage*). In Flaminio Scala’s *scenarii* ‘a rich robe for the Armenian merchant’ is listed in the props of the comedy *Li duo vecchi gemelli* (*The Two Old Twins*), whilst ‘a long Turkish-style robe’ was required in the Royal drama *L’Alvida.*

Cesare Vecellio’s *Habiti Antichi et Moderni di tutto il Mondo*, printed in 1590, provides a wealth of information about current costumes worn in Venice and beyond as well as in past epochs. Although it is amply clear that the *zanni* as a type originated in the Venetian Republic in the second half of the sixteenth century, no image of its costumes can be found in Vecellio’s work, presumably because the *zanni* was a theatrical invention based on reality only to some extent. As already mentioned in Chapter II various sources confirm that the real-life inspiration for the costumes of the *zanni* stock character was the light loose trouser suit worn by Bergamasque peasants, many of whom flocked into Venice to work as servants and porters in the fifteenth century. This is the type of costume worn, under a manservant jacket indicating their newly achieved social status in Venice, by the *Brighella* and *Harlequin* (c. 1720) marionettes in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, Venice.

**Harlequin, Hellequin, and al-Rikhim**

The *Harlequin* in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum (Fig. 63) is particularly worthy of interest not only for its costume (the *zanni* white outfit with multi-coloured patterns, worn under a Venetian jacket), but also for its full-face black mask.

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Many are the theories for Harlequin’s origins, which have been reviewed by Katritzky in *The Art of the Commedia*, essentially backing Lea’s belief that the creation of that mask should be credited to the Italian comedian Tristano Martinelli (1557-1630).\(^5\) Such an assumption is also based on recently discovered archive documents revealing that the aforementioned comedian, who signed himself as ‘Arlecchino’, was active in Paris in 1584-85.\(^6\) According to Driesen, the mask of Harlequin debuted in Paris as an invention inspired by the *Hellequin*, a devilish figure inherited from mystery plays.\(^7\) He also argued that the name Hellequin had its etymological roots in northern Europe, rather than in Italy. Yet, Alichino is one of the lion-headed demons in the eighth circle of hell within Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia*, illustrated in a mid-fifteenth-century miniature by Priamo della Quercia and Giovanni di Paolo within Dante’s *Divina Commedia* in the British library.\(^8\)

The Harlequin-demon association was emphasised in 1585 in a French poem, whose verses addressed to Harlequin recite ‘A Cerberus fort tu ressembles / quand tu joues masque’ (you look like a Cerberus when you play masked).\(^9\) The perception of this character as a figure associated with hell probably was due to the fact that

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\(^7\) O. Driesen, *Der Ursprung des Harlekin, ein kulturgesschichtliches Problem* (Berlin: Duncker, 1904), 188-277. Driesen’s view was shared by G. Jaffei, ‘Note critique su le maschere in genere e su Arlecchino in ispecie’, *Rivista Italia*, 1, 1910 (771-825). Both authors are cited in Katritzky (2006), 102.
Harlequin’s mask was a full-face *maschera bruna*, which Tomaso Garzoni associated with the devil too.¹⁰

Maurice Sand, moving from Marmontel’s remark that ‘A Bergamese negro is an absurdity, and therefore it is probable that an African negro was the first model of the character’, posited that the stock role of Harlequin could be reminiscent of the satyr or foreign slave characters of the Phylax farce performed in ancient Greece by the *phallophores* having their face covered with soot.¹¹ In the Hellenistic era the Phylax farce continued to be performed by the mimes across a vast territory including Egypt and Syria, and the domains that would later belong to the Byzantine Empire. Through the mimes this performance tradition was carried forward to the Renaissance so that — still according to Sand — the Latin word *sannio* was turned into *zanni* or *sanni* in the Venetian vernacular to define a mocker, or buffoon character performed by the comedians. The costume of Harlequin, with several patches of different colours over the white outfit of a *zanni*, could also derive from a model of the past, the multi-coloured outfit of a Roman mime described by Apuleius as a *mimi centunculo*.¹²

As already mentioned, the heritage from late antiquity was carried forward by the mimes not only in the Byzantine Empire, but also in the near East, particularly in Egypt. Analogies between the *commedia dell’arte* character of Harlequin and the obscene comic character of Alī Kākā in Arabic buffoonery have been brought to the fore by Ahmad Rushdī Sālih, although without identifying a common root for the names of the two characters.¹³

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¹¹ Sand (1915), 97-101.


I think that this missing link may be found in the Arabic shadow theatre from Egypt, a context in which cross-cultural dialogue with Venice was intense. The economic ties between the entrepreneurial nobility of the Venetian Republic and the Mamluk rulers were particularly strong during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, to the point that many cities under Mamluk control had a permanent Venetian diplomatic representative. The doge Francesco Foscari (1373–1457), was even born in Mamluk Egypt.14

In the Mamluk Sultanate, which encompassed Egypt, Syria and other Middle-Eastern territories from 1250 to 1517, shadow theatre (Karākūz or khayāl al-zīl) reached pinnacles of artistic achievement. Most scholars agree that this theatrical form had reached the Middle East from China through the Mongols in an earlier period, although no direct evidence supports this theory. Arabic shadow plays obeyed an established set of conventions, including buffoonery, and ‘were not far removed from the medieval Western drama, from the mysteries and moralities’, according to Badawi.15 The Karākūz plays were staged in public spaces during trade fairs or in the Ramadan period at night, and also in private venues to celebrate joyful occasions with sexual implications such as weddings and circumcisions. The repertoire of this genre came to light with the discovery of the so-called Manzala manuscript, possibly written around 1705, which includes popular shadow play texts attributed to several authors.16

One of these plays, Al-Manār aw Harb al-'Ajam (The Play of the Lighthouse or The War against the Foreigners), is believed to be based on an earlier source because its subject is the attack on Alexandria perpetrated by the crusaders in 1365.

Interestingly, this play features a Moroccan messenger who has come from Venice to warn the Muslims against the impending attack by the army of Peter of Cyprus and his allies. One of the main characters is al-Rikhim, an agile cat-like mannered fool with black mask that is ironically described by the presenter as ‘a lion given to devouring the hearts of the enemy’ but ‘rushing to hide behind the gate on the day of battle’.¹⁷ Interestingly, the Arabic name al-Rikhim has an assonance with the Italian Alichino (also Alichin), the lion-devil in Dante’s hell within the Divina commedia. The same applies to Arlecchino (also Arlechín in the Venetian dialect), the outrageous tumbling dancer with black full-face mask that debuted in the West as a protagonist of the late sixteenth-century commedia dell’arte seeing inception in Venice. The assonance between al-Rikhim and Alichino or Arlecchino perhaps has been overlooked because the suffix ‘al’ is often omitted in the translations from the Arabic. Nonetheless, as few Arabic shadow plays predating those transcribed in the Manzala manuscript have survived, it would be difficult to establish whether such an assonance mirrors a cultural influence from East to West or vice versa. At this stage, in fact, there is no certainty about when the Egyptian character named al-Rikhim originated in Egypt. Studies made on the Manzala manuscript, however, led to a generally accepted conclusion that a continuous performance tradition of shadow plays survived in Egypt at least from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. If the devilish character of al-Rikhim were rooted in the Arabic shadow play, its Western ‘siblings’, the Hellequins, could have reached Germany, France, and Italy through the crusaders or pilgrims who brought jigging puppets like those of Herrade von Landsberg into medieval Europe. Hopefully this possibility will be investigated more thoroughly by specialists with language skills and background knowledge for comparative studies.

Shadow Theatre Traditions

The Manzala manuscript provides a wealth of information about the repertoire, characters of the Arabic shadow theatre, and also reveals the identities of some Egyptian puppet players. One of them, Dāwūd al-Mānāwī, was a ‘spice vendor’. This biographic detail can be seen as bearing analogy with the lives of some ‘charlatans’ in Venice, who used puppets to attract people, to whom they would try to sell spices and all sorts of remedies.

From 1517 throughout the period of the Ottoman suzerainty over the Arab world it appears that the Karākūz from Egypt was transplanted, or merged with a local tradition in Turkish-speaking regions, where it further evolved as Karagöz. In the Karagöz the greater part of each shadow play consists in dialogues between the illiterate, witty Karagöz (meaning ‘black-eyed’ man in Turkish) and his friend Hadjeivat, who speaks pretentiously and uses Arab expressions to boast elegance and education, which in reality he lacks. The use of such a binary opposite exploiting the contrast between two different figures and their respective speeches reminds us the dialogue between the zanni and Pantalone, which is at the heart of the commedia dell’arte and its puppet theatre adaptations.

In his writings the Turkish traveller Evliya Chelebi (1611-1612) described the shadow plays that were staged in the Ottoman Empire at court and in public spaces as well. The

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19 See Chapter VII.


22 See Chapter II.

French botanist Jean de Thévenot (1633-1667) also wrote about the ‘marionnettes des Turquois’ in his travel book, and described a performance that he saw in Constantinople as follows:

Now, usually it is the Iuifs (literally ‘Jews’, perhaps meaning nomadic people) who play these puppets, which to me were unseen. They set in the corner of a room, lay down a carpet before them, and at the border of such carpet they place a frame, or squared window, which they cover with a piece of white canvas measuring at least two feet. Then they light up several candles behind it. And after having played with their hands so that their projected shadows appear like animal shapes on the canvas, they take several flat figures, which they skilfully move behind said canvas. In my opinion the cloth that they use as a screen gives a better effect than ours. While they manipulate the figures they sing several delightful songs in Turkish and Persian. The subject [of the representations], however, is very dirty as featuring nothing else but dishonest brutality. And yet, their audiences enjoy the show very much. It once happened to me that after the representation the host who had served me dinner gave me some of these puppets as a present.24

From de Thévenot’s account we can infer that the Karagöz was unseen in seventeenth-century France, where a shadow theatre tradition existed, but envisaged figures that were different from those used in Constantinople, and also the fabric used as a screen was not the same (probably gauze).

Offering more information about shadow plays that were performed in the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century is a letter by the Roman playwright Pietro della Valle (1586-1652). On 8 June 1614, from Venice, he embarked on the Gran Delfino war ship to

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24 Or, ce sont ordinairement des Iuifs qui font jouer ces marionnettes, & ie n’en ay pas veu d’autres; ils ne les font pas jouer comme en France; ils se mettent au coin d’une chambre, tendans un tapis devant eux, & au haut de ce tapis il y a une échancrure ou fenestre quarrée fermée d’un morceau de toile blanche ayant environ deux pieds, ils allument derrière plusieurs chandelles & après avoir représenté sur cette toile plusieurs animaux avec l’ombre de leurs mains, ils se servent de petites figures plates. Qu’ils font remuer si adroitement derrière cette toile, que cela fait à mon avis meilleur effet que les nostres, & ils chantent cependant plusieurs belles chansons en Ture & en Persan, mais le sujet en est très sale, n’estant remply que de brutalitez deshoneste, & toutesfois ils prennent grand Plaisir à les voir; mesme ie me trouvay un fois chez un renié, lequel m’ayant donné à souper me regala des marionnettes’. J. de Thévenot, Relation d’un voyage fait au Levant (L. Billaine: Paris, 1665), 66-67.
undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Before visiting Jerusalem, however, he spent one year in Constantinople. In that city he saw the shadow plays that he described in his letter dated 25 October 1614 as follows:

And yet, in the so-called coffee houses there also are some jugglers, who entertain the audiences with a thousand bagatelle (tricks). Amongst the ones that I saw the other night, when I went out, I should mention the representation made by some of them from behind an illuminated canvas, or paper sheet, with shadow puppets, which move, walk, and make countless motion scenes, like the ones that we sometimes see in our country within certain apparatuses. These shadow puppets, however, are not speechless like ours, but rather speak like the ones played by the bagatellieri in Naples, around the Castle, and in Rome, in Piazza Navona. The [Turkish] bagatelliere, alias the player gives vocal power to the puppets changing his voice pitch and speaking different languages, and is very clever in making funny jokes. The representations, however, are all obscene as they show dishonest acts between men and women with such a wealth of detail and extravagance that they would be too lascivious even in a brothel at carnival time, and certainly could not be a pastime during Lent.25

With this final remark della Valle implicitly compared Lent, a time for penitential practices during which puppet shows were the only entertainment permitted in most parts of Christian Europe, to Ramadhan in Muslim countries, a fasting month and yet a

25 ‘Però in tempo di digiuno in queste case di Cahue, che così si chiamano vi sono anche de’ giocolatori, che trattengono gli assistenti con mille bagatelle; e tra le altre, come vidi io l’altra sera, che vi andai, fanno veder loro, dietro una tela o carta illuminata, diverse rappresentazioni di ombre, e figure di fantochi, che si muovono, caminano, e fanno mille atti, come quelli che alle volte facciamo noi ancora in certi apparati. Le quali ombre di bambocci non si vedono però mute, come le nostre; ma le fanno parlare in quella guisa che fanno in Napoli al largo del Castello, & in piazza Navona in Roma, i bagatellieri; cioè, il giocolatore là dentro parla per loro con diversa voce in vari linguaggi, e fa diverse burle galanti assai bene: ma le rappresentazioni son tutte di cose oscenissime, e di atti tra huomini, e donne dishonesti, con far veder tali stravaganze di gesti e di stromenti, ingredienti che in il Carnevale in bordello sarebbon troppo lascivi, quanto più per passatempi della quaresima’. P. della Valle, Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino, con minuto ragguaglio di cose notabili osservate in essi, Descritti da lui medesimo in 54. Lettere familiari, Da diversi luoghi della intrapresa pellegrinazione, Mandate in Napoli all’erudito, e fra’ più cari, di molti anni suo amico. Mario Schipano. Divisi in tre parti. Cioè, la Turchia, la Persia, et l’India (Paolo Baglioni: Venice, 1667), ‘Letter 2 from Constantinople. 25 October 1614’, 67-68.
time during which ‘lanterns were lit every night in the streets and all night long feasts were held, balls were performed by the shameless youths of these people, shadow plays were staged with puppets and candles in a mode similar to that of our commedia, and other similar entertainments were made available’. Della Valle also explained that the main difference between the Karagöz and the Western shadow theatre was the use of speech in the Ottoman performance tradition, whose outrageous characters could be compared with the coeval speaking puppets impersonating characters of the commedia dell’arte. From his words we can infer that different puppet theatre traditions, each employing different kinds of dramatic figures, coexisted in Venice and in other cities of the Italian peninsula during the seventeenth century.

Like della Valle, in the seventeenth century Giandomenico Ottonelli made a distinction between speaking and speechless figures, a distinction entailing a thematic difference between the representations in which they were employed:

… some charlatans use the fantocci, or figures called burattini. And with these [hand] puppets they entertain simple minded and plebeian audiences in the streets. I would add that there are certain comedians who use pupazzi [string and rod puppets] to make dramatic performances, and can thus be defined as commedianti figurati. These belong to two categories, depending on the way in which they use their figures. In one performance mode speechless figures represent the characters of the story, and for this reason the players are called rappresentanti figurati, or bianti ombranti. Their figures are made of cardboard, and are manipulated behind a lit canvas so that the spectator only sees their shadows. The inventor of these figures was the Venetian Giuseppe Cavazza. With this staging practice only one player is necessary, and he presents each figure at a time.

Usually sacred representations of episodes from the Old Testament are staged in this way.  

26 Della Valle (1667), ‘Letter 14 from Aleppo. 27 August 1616’, 445. In this letter Della Valle mentions ‘giuochi d’ombre di bambocci al lume delle candele, a guise delle nostre commedie’ (shadow plays with puppets and candle light, similar to our comedies).
27 … tra’ Ciarlatai alcuni usano I fantocci, cioè le figure dette burattini, e con le fantoccerie trattengono nelle piazze I semplici, e plebei spettatori. Hora aggiungo in breve, che tra’ Comedianti alcuni si servono delle
The presence of a ‘presenter’ in the shadow plays described above is an element in common with the Arabic shadow theatre, which was not confined to comic shows, but probably dealt with moral, religious, or historical themes as well. Ottonelli’s account about the performances of the bianti ombranti is a precious record of the existence of shadow theatre in seventeenth-century Venice, of which no depiction is known. No biographic information has been found about its inventor, whose aristocratic surname suggests that he could be a prelate or member of an academy sponsoring dramatic performances.

From the traveller’s accounts discussed earlier and the absence of visual and documentary evidence testifying to the staging of Karagöz plays either in France or Italy, we can reasonably think that these representations were not staged in seventeenth-century Venice. Firstly, because an essential element of Karagöz, dialogue, would not be understood by most Venetians. Secondly, because this tradition would have had to compete with the repertoire of the new-born commedia dell’arte rooted in the Venetian culture. Thirdly, because the explicitness of sexuality, evidently going far beyond the level of obscenity for which Western puppeteers were blamed, would have induced the provveditori di comun, the inquisitori di stato or even the Council of the Ten to prohibit Karagöz representations in public spaces. And lastly, we should remember that in 1621 a building was allocated to the Turks as a store and hostel with curfew at night, requiring the traders of that foreign minority to be inside and accounted for by evening. The building, which became known as the Fontego dei Turchi, belonged to the Doge Antonio Priuli (1548-1623) when it was first allocated. It was leased to Muslims from Turkey, Albania,
and Bosnia with policies aimed at limiting both physical and visual access to the space itself, where at no times were women permitted within its walls. If Karagöz plays were ever performed in the Fontego dei Turchi, obviously not during the years of the Cretan and Morean wars, the audience could only include the Muslim tradesmen and ambassadors lodging, and being confined therein at night.

The Many Identities from the East

The Turks — Venice’s fiercest rivals and partners in trade, yet enemies in the many times of war for the dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean sea — were an ethnicity whose habits were known to most Venetians in the Renaissance. Their costumes were illustrated by Cesare Vecellio in his comprehensive *De gli Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Diverse Parti del Mondo* (1590) within the first book, ‘Habiti dell’Europa’. Interestingly, this classification is omitted in the selection of engravings from Vecellio’s work that was published in Venice in 1664, when the Cretan war (1645-1669) was enduring. In this edition the ‘Habiti dei Turchi’ are shown in Book VII, after those of Italy, France, Spain, England, Germany, and Poland: perhaps the notion of ‘Europe’ had changed.

Ronnie Mulryne wisely observed that ever since in Christian Europe the Turks have been the ‘ideal enemy to stage in any kind of spectacle, especially the *naumachie*, because their colourful costumes, large turbans, and curved swords allowed the viewers to spot them immediately even from a distant standpoint’. Indeed the theme of the battles of the Holy League against the Turks, and of course their defeat, was reiterated across

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Europe for more than a century after the public spectacles held in Venice in 1571 to celebrate the victory of Lepanto.\textsuperscript{31} Puppet theatre makes no exception: different Venetian marionettes portraying the Turks are displayed in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, including a white turbaned Turk trick marionette with a tongue moving mechanism (Fig. 78). A Turk with an unusual red turban (Fig. 77) closely resembles the image of Suleyman the Magnificent on the frontispiece of the Florentine libretto of Bonarelli’s Il Solimano, staged with costumes made according to Sansovino’s descriptions in his Historia universale dell’origine, et imperio de’ Turchi, published in Venice in 1573. Also belonging to the Ca’ Goldoni museum are two moor characters: an Ethiopian with richly adorned costume, and a chubby eunuch. Other marionettes whose costumes do not match precisely the depictions in Vecellio’s costume book could nonetheless effectively represent Persian or Arabian characters as wearing white and yellow turbans, and silk outer garments with embroidery.

As already mentioned in Chapter IV, the Ca’ Goldoni Museum owns a very interesting Armenian Merchant marionette, dressed with the traditional long outer garment of an orange shade (Fig. 72). The turban is lost, but from Vecellio’s commentary to the woodcut showing the clothing of an ‘Armeno di conditione’ (wealthy Armenian) in the 1664 edition of his costume book, we know that the turbans worn by the Armenians were light-blue with white and red stripes.\textsuperscript{32} The earliest evidence documenting the presence of the Armenians in Venice dates to the twelfth century. In the fifteenth century their community settled in that city near the church of Santa Croce, and in the sixteenth

\textsuperscript{31} M.C. Canova Green, ‘Lepanto Revisited: Water-fights and the Turkish Threat in Early Modern Europe (1571-1656), in M. Shewring, ed. (2013), 177-198. Noted in this essay comparing several naumachie are the festival books recounting the spectacles held in Venice in 1571 and 1572 to celebrate the victory of Lepanto. As primary sources see also Ragguaglio delle allegrezze, solemnità e feste fatte in Venetia per la felice vittoria (G.Perchaccino: Venice, 1571); and Ordine, et dechiaratione di tutta la mascherata Fatta nella Città Per la Gloriosa Vittoria contra Turchi (Venice, Giorgio Angelieri, 1572).

\textsuperscript{32} Vecellio (1664), IX, 374.
In the second decade of the eighteenth century a monk known as ‘Mechitar’, who had fled to Venice after the Ottoman invasion of Morea, was allowed to build the monastery that is still extant in the island called San Lazzaro degli Armeni. The Armenians as characters appear twice in the known, and probably partially reconstructed repertoire of puppet operas, more particularly in *La Damira Placata* (1680) and *Eurimedonte e Timocleone* (1746).

Whilst in the scenarii of the *commedia dell’arte* the plot most often takes place in Venice and in other Italian cities, in Venice’s puppet opera (and opera as well) the story never takes place in that city. The fictional place of action always belongs to a realm of the past such as ancient Rome or ancient Greece (i.e. *Il Leandro*, *L’Ulisse in Feaccia*, *Il Cajetto*, and *Orfeo ed Euridice*) or a distant land in the East, of which Northern Africa was part. In two out of three puppet operas by Acciaiouli the scene is set in Egypt (*La Damira Placata* and *Il Girello*), but only secondary characters are Ottoman. The last puppet opera staged in the Teatro San Girolamo offered insights into the Mughal Empire (*Gianguir*) blending romance with historical accounts. Perhaps the definition that best reflects the notion of an Eastern world in which the boundaries between the real and the imaginary are blurred in Venice’s puppet opera is the nonsensical geographical indication given in *The Sneeze of Hercules* for ‘the land of Pygmies’, a land ‘at the source of the River Nile, on the last mounts of India, enjoying a mild climate as it is always Spring’.  

**Venice and China**

No Chinese characters appear in the ten puppet *opera libretti* that are known. And yet, a remarkable number of eighteenth-century marionettes portraying Chinese figures are extant.

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33 Baykar, S. *Del Veneto, dell’Armenia, e degli armeni* (Canova: Treviso, 2000).
34 Martello (1745), 5.
The Davia Bargellini Museum owns a fascinating *King of Tartars* (Fig. 81) wearing the ‘horn-shaped cap under the crown’ described in the note to Vecellio’s woodcut depicting *Il Gran Cane de’ Tartari* in the 1664 edition of his costume book.\(^{35}\) The *King of Tartars* survives with four *Chinese Guards*, including one on horseback. These figures wear long pointed hats, similar to ones visible in Andrea Zucchi’s *Triumph of China* (Fig. 80).

Depicted in this etching is the allegorical *peota* (boat) that rode the Grand Canal in a waterborne pageant held on 27 May 1716 in honour of August II, Elector of Saxony in 1716. The theme chosen for such a spectacle can be explained with Cristiani’s observation that ‘to the marvels of the “Celestial Empire” the neo-Platonic culture added the vision of China as an ideal state, which was associated to Venice, equally representing a myth for its form of government and civilisation’.\(^{36}\)

The presence of Chinese figures in the domestic marionette theatres of *Settecento* Venice also reflects a fascination with the Orient, and the Chinese culture in particular, which gained momentum in Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century.\(^{37}\) Chinese artworks and crafts became increasingly fashionable, and the Venetians soon started producing Chinese-style furniture, lacquers, and textiles. Examples of both Chinese originals and Venetian imitations can be seen in Venice at the Ca’ Rezzonico Museum in the *sala delle lacche verdi*.\(^{38}\) Also displayed in that room are two eighteenth-century Chinese statuettes made of lacquered *papier maché* with jigging heads. These are not dramatic figures, but fancy collectibles.

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\(^{35}\) Vecellio (1664), ‘IX. Habiti dell’Asia’, 368.


In 1707 the first opera with action taking place in China, *Taican Re della Cina*, was staged in Venice at the Teatro San Cassiano.\(^{39}\) Others operas featuring Chinese protagonists would follow in the years ahead not only in the *Serenissima*, but also in cities of neighbouring states, especially Vienna.\(^{40}\) In carnival, in 1735, Metastasio’s one-act opera *Le Cinesi* (*The Chinese Women*) was performed with music by Reutter in the private apartments of Maria Theresa of Austria by the future empress, her sister Marianna, and a lady in waiting. In 1754 its revised version with music by Gluck was staged at the Habsburg court, and in 1758 it debuted in Venice.\(^{41}\) Metastasio’s *Le Cinesi* would shutter the perspective of the Venetian audience because it offered a reversed image of the imitation of China by the Europeans, or in other words Europe imitated by the Chinese. It would thus arouse some reflection on the true essence of China, which was something different from the *chinoiserie* of the Europeans.

Marionette theatre as an art form whose essential element is the play on perception so that the viewer shifts from engagement to estrangement, from illusion to reality, could not but reflect Venice’s imagery of China and at the same time a realistic view of the Chinese presence in the city. Whilst the figures in the Galleria Davia Bargellini look like fantastic beings from a chimerical land, the *Chinese Servant* in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum appears to be a fairly truthful portrayal of a Chinese man (Fig. 87). That marionette actually reminds the facial features and costume of the violin player depicted by Longhi’s ‘pennel che cerca il vero’, borrowing Goldoni’s words, in *The Concert* (Fig. 88).\(^{42}\)

Within the framework of puppet theatre the cross-cultural dialogue between Venice and China was perhaps more intense and fruitful than we would expect. In the

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previous chapters attention has been drawn on the construction of the Venetian string-and-rod puppets, which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were bigger than the early-eighteenth century examples preserved in museum collections. Why did their size change at some point? A possible answer is that small figures could fit better in domestic theatres meeting their patrons and collectors’ taste for miniatures. Another possible explanation, not excluding the previous one, is the absorption of an influence from a different tradition.

Preserved in the Museo-Biblioteca Teatrale del Burcardo, Rome, is a collection of very rare Chinese rod-and-string puppets inherited from the Florentine actor and theatre historian Luigi Rasi (1852-1918), who acquired them on the antique market as items of unknown provenance. These puppets, which are unpublished, measure nearly 35 cm in height. They are made of mixed materials, wood for the frame of the body, parchment for the hands, and lacquered papier maché for the feet and head. They have hooks at the wrists for the strings and a hook at the nape for the rod, with which they are manipulated from above (Fig. 82). That kind of construction makes them similar to the eighteenth-century Venetian marionettes from the technical point of view. Most characters have silk costumes with fine gold thread embroidery, another element that suggests comparison with the coeval Venetian marionettes.

In ancient China plays with marionettes were performed by itinerant show women in the courtyards of private houses. During the Sung and Ming periods (960-1643) performances were given with marionettes after funerals, in honour of the deceased. The figures in Rome, however, are not hieratic puppets: their iconography is not directly related to ritual, and this is why their significance remained obscure until now. These puppets replicate the characters and painted face masks of the Peking opera, or jingju.

43 B. Laufer, Oriental Theatricals (Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, Chicago, 1928), 40.
It is a genre combining script, singing, speech, and stylised movement through dance, acting, and acrobatic combat, and thus brings in ancient traditions although it became popular during the Quing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The figure in the Museo del Burcardo that is the key to understanding the iconography, and thus the nature and significance of the ensemble as a whole is the puppet whose face has the makeup called *xiaohualian* (the petty painted face), consisting of a small patch of white chalk around the nose. This makeup identifies the clowns of traditional Chinese drama, and occasionally a witty young page or ordinary workman character (Fig. 83). The Chinese collection in the Museo del Burcardo, comprising fifteen puppets in total, includes different characters associable to the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, for instance three *Old Men* and the treacherous white-faced prime minister *Cao Cao*. There also is a *Judge* (Fig. 86), whose half white and half black mask symbolises balance, and a pair composed by a male figure and female figure dressed in costumes of the same purple colour (symbolising uprightness, sophistication) enriched with gold thread embroidery (Figs. 84 and 85).

The fact that these puppets relate to the opera originating in their cultural area should not surprise. According to Jurkowski, ‘attempts to discover the precedence of puppets before actors has been an Asian specialty. In China many scholars have been trying to prove that the first players of Chinese opera were puppets, and that the human singers and dancers who came later repeated the puppets’ movements, the true basis of the scenic style of opera production’.

Upon discovery of the dramatic nature of the Chinese puppets in the Museo Teatrale del Burcardo, which are something more than decorative objects, it is possible to understand the symbolic meanings that they conveyed, and the values of the culture in

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which they originated. Only at that point it is possible to compare them with the Venetian marionettes. An interesting aspect emerging from the comparative analysis of the early eighteenth-century figures giving shape to the characters from the Peking opera and those from the repertory of opera in Europe, respectively, is the difference in their aesthetics. Indeed, the visual appearance of the figures reveals their belonging either to the Celestial Empire or the Most Serene Republic because they bring in the heritage of the cultural areas in which they originated. Eugenio Barba observed in his theory of daily and extra-daily techniques that the performance traditions of the East tend to provide a stylised depiction of the world, whilst those of the West mainly emphasise realism (with a few exceptions such as the *commedia dell’arte* and classical ballet). To some extent this is also true as far as the puppet theatre traditions in question are concerned. Perhaps as a result of Venice’s cultural and commercial exchanges with the East, however, many are the analogies between the Venetian marionettes of the Baroque and the coeval Chinese string-and-rod puppets in terms of construction, operating technique, interrelationship with other genres conjoining the arts. Moreover, in both cases we can see that there is a combination of stock roles, myth, and ordinary characters, and also an incorporation of aesthetic values entailing preciousness. As suggested by Michael Sullivan, therefore, it could be argue that ‘The meeting of Eastern and Western art is always more than a synthesis; it offers creative possibilities for interaction between East and West, a process in which the great civilizations preserve their own character while stimulating and enriching each other’.  

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PART III

PUPPETRY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE
Chapter VII
Puppet Theatre in Public Spaces of Settecento Venice

The operatic performances staged with figures in the aristocratic residences of Venice, and also in the public theatres that were built in this city in the age of the Baroque reflected a widespread passion for theatrical arts. In this chapter attention will be drawn to the puppet theatre shows that were held in open-air spaces of Venice during the eighteenth century. The spaces and times of performance will be analysed as well as the identities of the puppeteers, their figures, and their audiences. All this with a view to understanding how Venice’s identity was depicted in the puppet theatre scenery, and conversely how puppet theatre was represented in Venice as scenery.

Charlatans, Cosmoramas and Casotti
Gaetano Zompini’s collection of sixty etchings depicting Le arti che vanno per via nella città di Venezia (1753) bears witness to the presence of street vendors in open-air spaces of Venice during the eighteenth century.¹ The fifty-fifth print of the series shows a man asking one soldo for having a look into his cabinet, called Mondo Novo (Fig. 90). As we can infer from the descriptive verses for this image, such a device was a cosmorama, an optic box showing views of the ‘New World’ obtained with mirrors, lenses, and illumination. As already mentioned in Chapter II, the mondo novo appeared in Europe in the sixteenth century and was known to be an Italian invention, probably Venetian.² Tassini made no mention about the exhibition of these proto-magic lanterns in the calle and ponte del mondo novo in the parish of Santa Maria Formosa, where they were probably crafted by

² Varey (1957), 10.
the casseleri, most of whom were based in this part of the city. The examples of the mondo novo were certainly exhibited under the porticoes of Palazzo Ducale in Piazza San Marco, as we can see in two paintings by Pietro Longhi (1702-1785), one of which is in Venice, Querini Stampalia Collection, whilst the other is in Vicenza, Gallerie di Palazzo Leoni Montinari.³ Other visual sources reveal that these cabinets were popular in the eighteenth century, for example Harlequin Cheating Pantalone with a Mondo Novo can be seen in a pen and ink drawing by Giuseppe Zocchi (1711-1767) in Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei disegni (inv. 46-6520). Mention should also be made of Giandomenico Tiepolo’s Il Mondo Novo (Fig. 92), originally frescoed at Villa Valmarana ai Nani in San Bastiano di Vicenza and now in the Ca’ Rezzonico Museum in Venice.⁴

The penultimate etching in Zompini’s series of animated street views of Venice shows a youth with a privilegium (charter with seal) standing on a raised stage near a puppet booth (Fig. 91). On the ground a man who appears to be a Chinese opium smoker points at the youth before an audience of men only. From the commentary to this image, we can infer that the puppet show was an expedient to attract men, to whom the youth would try to sell an ointment, presumably for sexual enhancement.⁵ The youth is thus a quack imitating the practice perpetrated by a woman called Gambacurta (presumably a nickname, meaning ‘short leg’). From the account provided by Pietro Gradenigo (1695-1776) in his Notatori we know that she hired garzoni to sell her allegedly healing ointment. Her open stand with a puppet booth was in Piazza San Marco, to the right when looking at the columns.⁶ As already mentioned in Chapter VI,

⁵ The wording recites ‘With a man playing puppets and showing this ancient privilegium, my ointment I sel to the baboonish’.
spice vendors using puppets to attract customers are documented in Mamluk Egypt. Nonetheless, also in the West this expedient was widespread amongst charlatans, who used theatricality to promote their allegedly healing products. Margaret A. Katritzky investigated the combination of three elements in their practice – the medical, the itinerant, and the theatrical. 7

To the quack, or charlatans of his time Giandomenico Ottonelli addressed harsh words in his treatise:

È opinione di un Moderno, che il primo che trovò l’arte del Ciarlatano, fu il Diavolo; quando nel paradiso terrestre fece cinque cose: la prima si mascherò, prendendo la forma del Serpente; la seconda salì su l’arbore; la terza disse quella gran bugia; nequaquam oriemini: la quarta ingannò i primi Genitori nostri con quell’avviso; eritis sicut dij. E la quinta vendè loro il pomo da Dio vietato, Ne comedas. E queste cinque condizioni esprimono i ciarlatani tristi, come seguaci del Diavolo: poiché si mascherano, salgono in banco, dicono bugie, ingannano i semplici, e vendono mercantia. E per haver concorso usano vari allettamenti, tra quali alcuni si possono chiamar giuochi meravigliosi per allettare. Tali sono il camonar, o balar su la corda; il far le forze di Hercole; l’usare salti mortali, il volare da un luogo ad un altro con una fune, il giuocar d’arme in vari modi, il caminar con le mani à piedi alzati; il far ballar, e saltare una bestia, […] Ingannar gli occhi altrui con varie destrezze di mano […] e altre cose di simil fatta, overo superstiziose.

(It is the opinion of a Modern author that the first to discover the art of the charlatan was the devil; while in Paradise he did five things. Firstly, he masked himself as a serpent. Secondly, he climbed on the tree [of knowledge of good and evil]. Thirdly, he told the great lie: nequaquam moriemini. Fourthly, he deceived our first parents with the advice: eritis sicut dii. And fifthly he sold them God’s forbidden fruit, [labelled] ne comedas. And these five things do the miserable charlatans as followers of the devils because they mask themselves, step up on a stage, tell lies, deceive the simple-minded, and sell stuff. And to pursue their intents they use various systems to attract people, including some which can

be called alluring tricks, for example rope walking or dancing, using the strength of Hercules, jumps of death, mock skirmishing, showing off trained animals, […] making sleight-of-hand tricks […] and other similar things arousing superstition).8

Notwithstanding the blame that had been put on charlatans for centuries, street vendors, fortune tellers, animal trainers, wandering performers, and puppeteers found a wide audience in the streets of Venice.

Pietro Longhi portrays them in the so-called ‘charlatan’ series, including different paintings that show a quack near a puppet booth on a raised stage. Longhi’s The Quack in the Ca’ Rezzonico Museum, Venice, shows a man near a puppet booth with a zanni puppet on a raised stage, under the portico of Palazzo Ducale. He is holding up an ampule, presumably containing a love potion, which he is trying to sell to three young women looking at him. Two lovers in the foreground, who evidently do not need it, are walking away.9 An example, whose composition closely resembles the painting in the Ca’ Rezzonico Museum, survives in London in a private collection.10 Also very similar, is The Quack in Vicenza, Gallerie di Palazzo Leoni Montinari (Fig. 92). In this case, however, the audience includes three young women, three boys, a man, but no lovers.11 A diploma (fake privilegium) laying on the stage suggests an association between this painting and Garzoni’s print examined earlier (Fig. 93). The same applies to The Quack in the Fornoni Bisacco Collection, Venice. Yet, in this painting a youth with an opium smoking pipe can be seen at the extreme left.12 This detail is a clue that not only reveals the nature of the substance sold by the charlatan, it also

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8 Ottonelli (1652), 439-440.
9 Pignatti (1969), 89-90, pl. 160.
10 Ibid., 78, pl. 162.
11 Ibid., 85, pl. 161
12 Ibid., 93, pl. 267. See also A. Ravà, Pietro Longhi (Florence, 1923), 55; V. Moschini, Pietro Longhi (Milan, 1956), 36; and R. Pallucchini, La pittura veneziana del Settecento (Venice and Rome, 1960), 186.
testifies to the Serenissima’s trade of opium and other drugs, which the Venetian merchants imported from the Levant (principally Turkey and Persia, but also China) and sold to Western Europe either as pure ingredients or combined within a composite preparation called thearica. In the light of the opium trade, that cross-cultural exchange between China and Venice extended to their puppet theatre traditions in the age of opera, as discussed in Chapter VI, appears to be more realistic.

An opium smoker with a takiyah (short, rounded skullcap worn by Middle-Eastern men) can be seen in Borgogna’s Puppet Theatre (c. 1760) by Pietro Longhi in Vicenza, Gallerie di Palazzo Leoni Montinari (Fig. 94). In this painting a puppet player named Borgogna stands next to his puppet booth on a raised stage within a casotto. Such an enclosed space allowed the puppeteers to perform for paying spectators, and thus make a living with their shows. As will be discussed in more detail below, eighteenth-century written sources relate that puppeteers attracted a wide audience in Venice. Longhi’s painting portrays a mixed audience, including noblemen and ladies, members of the clergy, young people and children as well. Borgogna’s shows in particular were known to be amusing, and this image offers an insight into his puppet booth, within which we can glimpse a zanni with a slapstick and an animal puppet.

According to Danila dal Pos, Borgogna’s descendants claimed that their famous ancestor inherited the puppets from his onetime rival, Ottavio Paglia Longa (1670-1734), as the latter died with no issue. This was not unusual amongst puppeteers, and similar circumstances occurred also in other contexts until the twentieth century. The only two known puppets originally belonging to Ottavio

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15 D. dal Pos, *Burattinai e marionettisti a Castelfranco e nella Marca* Trevigiana (Corbo e Fiore, 1984), 13. The source of this information is not cited.
Paglialonga are the *Pantalone* with dark full-face mask and the *Devil* displayed in Parma, Museo Castello dei Burattini Giordano Ferrari (Figs. 95 and 96). These hand puppets are impressive for their powerful visual impact, and still arouse irrational fears while evoking an imaginary world inhabited by supernatural creatures. The horned *Devil* with dark face, glass-paste eyes, prominent nose, and big teeth is as scary as *Pantalone*, who wears a dark, pointed-chin mask.

Borgogna’s audience possibly included Carlo Goldoni, who wrote about his passion for puppets in his *Memoirs*. Not without scorn, the poet and playwright Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806) composed a sonnet with a verse reciting ‘Here comes the son of that Giulio the doctor / to play the doctor of Borgogna the puppeteer’. These words foreshadowed the bitter dispute between Gozzi and Goldoni, which reached the apex in the late 1750s. Dating to these years is Gozzi’s satirical piece entitled *Il Teatro Comico all’Osteria del Pellegrino tra le Mani degli Accademici Granelleschi*, in which he wrote: ‘And then we saw a monster coming to the puppet booth of Borgogna. His mask could make him appear like an educated man, but the Granelleschi academicians could see what he really was’.

Founded by Carlo Gozzi and his brother Gasparo, the Venetian Accademia dei Granelleschi forged hostility toward formal innovation in theatre, and fought against Goldoni’s staging of realistic characters. They also accused Goldoni of

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16 See Chapter V.
neglecting the theatrical tradition of his own culture as he moved away from the masks of the *commedia dell’arte*.

In reality Goldoni’s ‘Reform’ infused new life to theatre and puppet theatre as well, which was one of his passions. His witty plays could easily be adapted for representations with figures: even without a mask, the *Venetian Lady* in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum would perfectly impersonate the protagonist of Goldoni’s *Locandiera (The Mystress of the Inn)* (Fig. 68). Indeed, Goldoni’s realistic representation of the Venetian society, yet enhanced by the ‘light’ of theatre, has been compared with Longhi’s painting by art historians.¹⁹

Goldoni and Longhi’s insights into Venice and its puppet theatre with historical notation are detailed by Pietro Gradenigo (1695-1776), who wrote in his *Notatori* that in the second half of the eighteenth century both Paglialonga and Borgogna ‘were overshadowed by a foreigner’ who played his puppets every evening in Campo Sant’Angelo, in front of the theatre, ‘con gran concorso di denaro’ (making a great amount of money).²⁰ While adding a commentary to his watercolour depicting a *Puppet Player* in the four-volume costume book commissioned by Pietro Gradenigo, the artist Giovanni Grevembroch (1731-1807) misinterpreted the words of his patron in that he wrote that Paglialonga was the foreigner competing with Borgogna. Grevembroch’s costume book and the illustration in question is in Venice, Museo Civico Correr.²¹ In spite of the

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aforementioned mismatch, Grevenbroch’s commentary is precious because it provides some information about the composition of the puppeteers’ audiences in Venice, the way in which these audiences were gathered, and which characters were staged to entertain them.

Fu rinchiuso in un casotto sopra la piazza l’oltraggioso rinoceronte, e poco distante dal recinto, dove si faceva la recita con alcune snodate picciole figure, ch’esprimevano al naturale tutto ciò che in un gran teatro potea rappresentarsi. Il popolo era invitato a vederle dale grida di corrispondenti loquaci, manifestature, assai ben animate da franca mano. Fra gli popolari divertimenti, che in questa allegra metropolis ritrovansi, fu sempre gradito quello, che in altra età si inventò, col nascondersi il ciallatano dietro un telaro, coperto di sacco, e da fori giocando alcuni bambozzi si bene, che sembrava avessero la favella, mediante una rauca piva, ch’egli teneva in bocca. Simil specie di fievole Castello, non solo quasi ogni dì in più parti della piazza di S. Marco prende posto, ma per le Contrade, fermandosi ove più osserva concorrenza di fanciulli, invogliati di spasso, cui molto inclinano eziando uomini e femine in avanzata età, somministrando qualche riconoscenza per il sollazzo ricevutosi da i loro figliuoli al maneggiatore di tali ridicoli burattini. Questi sono chiamati Pulcinella, Arlichino, Zapicone, Turco, soldato, Padrona, Marcolfa, e Franceschina.

(The outrageous rhinoceros was kept in a fenced space in the piazza, not very far from the enclosure where a play was performed with small articulated figures, which in a natural manner represented everything that could be staged in a great theatre. The people were attracted by the shouts of talkative men and the appearance of the figures, which were played by skilful hands. Amongst the popular entertainments of this merry city, always favourably received was the one invented in another time, whereby the charlatan hides...

behind a curtained frame and shows off some puppets. They are played so skilfully that they appear to be able to speak, whilst it is the puppeteer who gives them voice with a swazzle in his mouth. This kind of puppet booth not only can be seen in different parts of Piazza San Marco, but also in the parishes as the puppeteer sets it up where he sees that there are numerous children, as they like to be entertained. Moreover adult men and women are inclined to reward them, and are thankful if the puppeteer lets the children play with their funny puppets. These are called Pulcinella, Arlichino, Zapicone, Turk, soldier, lady, Marcolfa, and Franceschina.\(^\text{22}\)

Gevembroch’s words complement Longhi’s depictions of The Rhinoceros at the Ca’ Rezzonico Museum in Venice, National Gallery in London, and Collezione Leoni Montinari in Vicenza.\(^\text{23}\) In eighteenth-century Venice exotic animals were kept in the area of Venice known today as the Giardini, where the Biennale takes place. Given that Borgogna’s casotto was close to the enclosure with the rhinoceros, we can infer that it is in that part of the city that he performed his puppet shows, which did feature stock roles of the commedia dell’arte, including masks originating from other contexts such as Pulcinella (Punch).\(^\text{24}\)

This popular character and a Turk with a slapstick can be seen in the Puppet Theatre Booth in a Venetian Campiello painted by Francesco Fedeli, known as ‘il Maggiotto’ (1738-1805) in Milan, Museo Teatrale alla Scala (Fig. 99).\(^\text{25}\) An etching after this painting by Giovanni Volpato (1732-1803) is displayed in the Rhode Island

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\(^\text{24}\) On this stock character see M. Byrom, Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre (Centaur: Fontwell, 1983).

\(^\text{25}\) Information about this museum and its collections can be found in the institutional web site, http://www.teatroallascala.org/it/scopri/museo-teatrale/museo-teatrale.html; 16 September 2014.
This image is important because it confirms Grevenbroch’s account relating that puppeteers performed not just in Piazza San Marco, but throughout Venice. Despite the details of a church in the background, it has not been possible to identify the *campiello* in which the puppet show depicted took place.

In Maggiotto’s painting as well as in Zompini’s engravings and in the artworks that will be discussed later, the open-air scenes with puppeteers always take place during the day. In his article on puppet theatre in Venice the historian Malamani affirmed that puppet shows had to end before the opening times of the theatres in Venice.27 Such a statement, however, is in contradiction with Gradenigo, who wrote on 16 August 1759 that ‘for one month two stages have been erected in Piazza San Marco by the charlatans, one next to the other […]. They increasingly attract audiences, and this is improper also because their shows go on even after two at night. On one stage the *commedia* is performed by histrions, and on the other stage it is represented with puppets, which are skilfully played’.28 The excesses noted by Gradenigo, adding to the presence of quacks with puppet booths during the day, led the Procurator Marco Contarini to have the *puricinei* (Punches) banned from Piazza San Marco in 1760, although such a banishment was soon revoked.29

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27 V. Malamani, ‘Il teatro drammatico: le marionette e i burattini a Venezia nel secolo XVIII’, *Nuova Antologia*, XXXII (1897), 128.
Nuns and Puppets: the Convent of San Zaccaria

Piazza San Marco, the piazzetta, the quay, and the campielli were not the only performance spaces for puppeteers in Venice. As already discussed in Chapter V, puppet operas and plays were also staged in domestic theatres set within noble palaces of the Serenissima. Moreover, three paintings reveal that puppet shows were performed in the parlour of the Benedictine nunnery of San Zaccaria until the eighteenth century.

The earliest image showing puppet theatre performances in this setting is a painting by Francesco Guardi dating around 1745-50 and now in the Ca’ Rezzonico Museum, Venice (Fig. 100). The puppet booth in the parlour is the traditional castello in use since the Middle Ages, and the puppets therein must have been similar to those of Paglialonga (see Figs. 94 and 95).

A slightly later painting offering an insight into the setting under examination is The Parlour of the Nunnery of San Zaccaria attributed to Pietro Longhi and now in the Ca’ Goldoni Museum, Venice (Fig. 101). A very similar, coeval version of this composition is preserved in Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilij. In Longhi’s paintings the nuns wear the religious habit, and the puppets played by an itinerant musician and his helper appear to be more appropriate for a would-be austere context: unlike the hand puppets depicted in Guardi’s painting, these jigging puppets were not supposed to speak, and thus be obscene. Moreover, jigging puppets had been played in convents across Europe since the Middle Ages. They appeared in a famous illustration of the Hortus

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31 See Pignatti (1969), 123, pl. 460. See also A. Ravà (1923), 721; and Pignatti (1960), 219.
32 See Pignatti (1969), 123, pl. 464. See also A. Ravà (1923).
deliciarum (1175-1185) by Herrade von Landsberg, Abbess of Hohenburg Abbey in the Vosges mountains.\textsuperscript{34}

Puppetry and sacred representations were not infrequent in female convents across Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{35} Nonetheless, in Guardi and Longhi’s paintings, which date to the mid-eighteenth century, the puppets are not played by the nuns. Rather, they are played by itinerant entertainers for the nuns and their visitors in a space that was the place where religious and secular life met. Indeed, in Renaissance Venice convent parlours became centres for a rich and active social life where visits were received and entertainments such as balls and puppet shows were occasionally held on feast-days.\textsuperscript{36} Things were supposed to change when the licentiousness of non-observant nuns induced the Council of Ten (who ensured the Venetian Republic’s control over all aspects related to civic life) to issue a restrictive law regulating the nun’s clausura in 1514. Like the 1508 decree prohibiting unauthorised theatrical performances in Venice, however, the 1514 law would be reissued many times because constantly infringed.\textsuperscript{37} In 1521 the Council of Ten established a commission to deal with convent protests against the reforms aimed at limiting the connections between the nuns and the secular world. This temporary body was soon replaced by the Magistrato sopra i monasteri, a magistracy charged with the general supervision and administration of the convents, which was later to become the Provveditori sopra i Monasteri di monache, who responded to the Council of Ten.\textsuperscript{38} Although the convent magistrates prosecuted infractions to enclosure, little changed in their parlours as, according to Mary Laven, ‘nuns had consistently

\textsuperscript{34} See Chapters I and II.
encouraged laypeople to visit, and had relied on the enticements of food, drink, music and theatre in order to maintain connections with the wider world’.39 Indeed Guardi and Longhi’s depictions of the Parlour of the Nunnery of San Zaccaria bear witness to the fact that any attempt at seclusion of the nuns in San Zaccaria had failed. The reason for this has been explained by Sharon T. Strocchia, who posited that Venetian patrician women exercised a great control of wealth, and the convents that they ran occupied a special place in Venice’s ‘civic religion and ideology’.40 It should also be remembered that the nunnery of San Zaccaria had a privileged status, recognised with a solemn yearly visit by the doge on Easter Sunday. Some chroniclers claimed that such a privilege was occasioned by the abbess of San Zaccaria having embroidered the first coronet ducale (coronation hat for the doge).41 With the fall of the Most Serene Republic there would be no more nuns, privileges, and puppets in San Zaccaria as Napoleon would secularise the convent.

Views of Venice with, and in Puppet Theatre

The puppeteers who performed in the parlour of the nunnery of San Zaccaria did not have to walk a long way from their most usual performance spaces, Piazza San Marco and the Piazzetta. In the seventeenth century Joseph Heintz the younger depicted puppeteers and comedians in *The Piazza San Marco at Carnival Time* (Fig. 20). From the written sources mentioned earlier we know that these street performers continued to share the audiences gathering in these open-air spaces at the heart of Venice. Visual sources also testify to their presence in Piazza San

39 Laven (2003), 203-204.
Marco throughout the eighteenth century. The first to mention is *Puppeteers and Comedians in Piazza San Marco under the Campanile* (c. 1700) by Luca Carlevarjis (1663-1730) in a private collection (Fig. 102). In this painting while live actors can be seen on a raised stage near the campanile, the puppeteers are in the South-West corner of the portico of Palazzo Ducale, facing the Piazzetta. More distant from the portico is the raised stage with a booth depicted in *A Puppet Show on the Piazzetta* (c. 1740) by Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as ‘Il Canaletto’ (1697-1768), in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 103). Almost in the same position in the Piazzetta, but viewed from the back looking towards the library is the *Puppet Theatre in the Piazzetta before the Library* (1740-41) by Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780) in York, The Castle Howard Collection (Fig. 104). In this work Bellotto replicated the view painted by his famous uncle, Canaletto, in the *Puppet Theatre in the Piazzetta* (1738), which was auctioned at Christie’s in 2005 (Fig. 105). Two more paintings by Canaletto depicting puppet theatre on a raised stage in the Piazzetta appeared on the antique market in 2008 and 2012.

A contemporary author influenced by Carlevarjis, Johann Richter (1665–1745), replicated in two paintings a composition showing comedians on a raised stage in Piazza San Marco under the campanile, and a puppet booth to the right looking at San Marco. One is the *Piazza San Marco* in Sarasota, The Ringling Museum of

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44 See E. Camesasca, *L’Opera completa di Bellotto* (Rizzoli: Milan, 1974)
Art. The other is the *Piazza San Marco* formerly in the Collection of I. Brass, Venice (current whereabouts unknown).  

Unique, instead is the *Piazza San Marco Looking West from the North End of the Piazzetta* (1744) by Canaletto in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle (Fig. 106). In this view towards the library, the *loggetta* under the campanile, and San Marco to the right, Canaletto painted a puppet theatre from the back, in a piazzetta enlivened by other performers, and charlatans.

All these views on one hand are historical records documenting the presence of puppeteers in *Settecento* Venice and their popularity. On the other, as expressions of Vedutism, they testify to a taste for theatricality and perspective view intertwining with an upsurging passion for miniature and collecting, as discussed in Chapter V. In this play of resemblances puppet theatre, even in its more ‘simple’ manifestation (the hand puppets played in a small booth) adopted scenes with attempted perspective views of the Piazzetta. Two examples of this kind survive in Budrio, Museo del Burattino (Figs. 97 and 98). The aristocratic marionette theatre in the V&A Museum of Childhood, instead, retains its beautiful scenery with a perspective view of Piazza San Marco.

Eugene J. Johnson, and other art historians before him, discussed the theatricality of Venice’s *Piazzetta* from an architectural standpoint. I would argue that over the centuries this unique space conjoined the arts in different kinds of spectacles with animated figures – floating on water, being carried in procession, moving on raised stages, or played in a puppet booth as those animating the pictures by the foremost Vedutist painters of *Settecento* Venice.

48 Ibid., pl. 166. See also Reale and Succi (1994), 32, pl. 9.  
49 Constable (1976), I, 201; and II, pl. 18, no. 37.  
Conclusion

The last chapter of this dissertation ended with a glimpse of eighteenth-century Venice and its street performers through Canaletto’s views of Piazza San Marco. This artist, who enjoyed great success in England, where he also immortalised Warwick Castle with his distinctive painting style, offered a perspective that helped me finding an answer to the question that induced me to undertake this research at the University Warwick.¹ What made Venice’s theatre and visual culture unique? Based on my findings, I would argue that it was the Venetians’ ability to preserve their own cultural identity, and yet develop it also through dialogue and confrontation with other realities. This entailed trade, cultural exchange, and cross-fertilisation in the arts. In this perspective some scholars compared the Most Serene Republic with Britain. For instance, in his incipit of the Stones of Venice John Ruskin wrote that ‘since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England’. Blurring boundaries between space and time, Ruskin thus drew a parallel between three empires. Of these, Tyre represented the East, and yet the past. England represented the West, and hopefully the future. And Venice was the in-between, a presence that Ruskin saw as a ‘faint reflection in the mirage of the lagoon’ so that he doubted ‘which was the City, and which the Shadow’.²

Following Ruskin’s footpath, I endeavoured ‘to trace the lines of this image’ by reconstructing a history of Venice’s dramatic figures and performances. I cannot but agree with Ruskin’s statement that it is ‘a history which, in spite of the labour of countless chroniclers, remains in vague and disputable outline – barred with brightness and shade’.³ Nonetheless, any thorough effort to glean the expression of Venetian character through

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¹ See D. Buttery, Canaletto and Warwick Castle (Phillimore: Guildford, 1992).
³ Ibid.
the arts by investigating Venice’s theatre and visual culture from the past may help in countervailing the dissolution of that ‘fainting image’. It may also help retain a memory of Venice’s performances with mechanised figures on water and in theatres, shadow puppets, hand puppets, and marionettes moving at the sound of music or in synchrony with the natural speech rhythms of different dialects.

This study offers new insights to the knowledge of Venice’s history and puppet theatre historiography. In the first chapter, two early-fifteenth-century miniatures, unpublished in theatre literature, have been brought to the fore showing how a minority could be labelled and objectified in medieval Europe, and in the visual and performative culture mirroring such a historic reality. The suggested overlap between puppetry and acting in the _Jeu d’Adam_, based on the stage directions indicating that a ‘serpens artificiosus’ should climb the tree of knowledge and speak to Eve, is also unprecedented in puppet theatre literature, whereby this kind of crossover is often argued in general terms, without referring to any particular representation. In the many studies on the _Jeu d’Adam_ the presence of a puppet on the medieval stage appears to be marginal, overshadowed by other aspects that for some reason were worthy of more attention (i.e. text, language, or music). Indeed, aspects related to dramatic performances with figures have frequently been overlooked by historians in either visual culture or theatre culture, perhaps because puppetry belongs to both spheres, and yet not entirely to either of the two. Only a few years ago Kamil Kopania filled an immense gap in the study of the kind of objects that are often regarded as mere religious sculptures, regardless of the fact that their construction with articulated limbs and/or mechanical devices making them able to ‘move’ or ‘speak’ reveals that they were ‘hieratic puppets’, according to Magnin’s definition. This aspect is important not just for abstract classification, but to understand the true essence of these ‘animated’ sculptures, the meanings that they conveyed, and how they were used as agents between the divine and the earthly world of ‘actors’ and
spectators. In this dissertation I provided an overview of the ‘animated sculptures’ that are extant on Venice’s mainland, mainly in territories contested with the Habsburgs, and a possible explanation of the reason why none of them were found in the city of Venice.

In the second chapter, dedicated to the revival of different kinds of puppets and mechanised figures in the age of the Renaissance, I provided a detailed example of cross-fertilisation between puppetry and *commedia veneta*. Analising the stock roles, dialogues, and autobiographical reference in a play by Marin Negro, I brought to the fore a hand puppet of his, one of the rare sixteenth-century pieces that are extant (Fig. 21). Indeed, it appears that while literature historians studied the play and forgot the puppet, puppet theatre specialists forgot the play and often the puppet as well. Only by bringing Marin Negro’s *Friar* puppet and *La Pace* comedy in a single framework, however, is it possible to outline the ‘fainting image’ of a Venetian playwright who was also a puppet player since he saw himself as a necromancer.

The third chapter sheds light on two outstanding protagonists of Venice’s theatrical life, and yet again little attention has been given to the scenic figures that were devised for their operatic productions. The analysis of the *libretti* and festival books of the spectacles patronised by Pio Enea II degli Obizzi and Marco Contarini in Padua during the seventeenth century led to the discovery of details which have been overlooked by historians, perhaps because they focused on either one or the other. And yet these details are clues suggesting that after Pio Enea II degli Obizzi died, his scenic machinery passed on to Marco Contarini, for whom he had evidently been a model as patron of the arts and collector.

Studying the libretti of puppet operas that were performed in the domestic theatre at Ca’ Labia, in eighteenth-century Venice, I was also able to identify the artist who designed the settings for these representations. Attention to detail also allowed me to identify the coat of arms of the marionette theatre now at the V&A Museum of Childhood,
and add a little piece to the puzzle of its history (Figs. 56-56c). Some of the marionettes in this theatre are unpublished, and have been presented in this dissertation casting light on the exquisite silk embroidery on their costumes, possibly executed by the nuns of the convent of Santa Marta in Venice (Figs. 57-60).

Critical analysis of the repertory of puppet opera and speculation on the aesthetics and operating techniques of the figures that were used has been made relating texts to specific objects in Chapters IV and V. Some of the more interesting pieces examined are unpublished and/or in storage, including a *Venetian Lady* with wax hair in the Davia Bargellini Museum, Bologna (Fig. 69). Also worthy of mention are two Venetian marionettes in the Musées Gadagne, Lyon, which belong to a unique ensemble of large Venetian marionettes dating between the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries (Figs. 37-38). The reconstruction of puppet opera in Venice, and its echoing in other cities brought to the fore similarities and differences in repertory, space and time of performance, composition of the audience, and audience response whenever possible.

Two marionettes by the Venetian Pietro Resoniero and the Bergamasque Pietro Bernardone, both active in eighteenth-century Vienna, illustrate this discussion (Figs. 65-66). A photograph of an eighteenth-century Venetian marionette theatre that appeared on the antique market in Paris in 1933 (current whereabouts unknown) has been rediscovered (Fig. 55). If still extant, this fine theatre would add to only two comparable examples in London and Venice. Finally, attention has been given to a miniature theatre from *Settecento* Venice that belonged to Don Giovanni Guiso, the last Baron of Orisei, who in 2006 bequeathed his collection to the civic museum that bears his name (Fig. 89).

Aside from testifying to miniature collecting in the Baroque age, this jewel-like theatre housing the mechanised figures of Pantalone and Columbine can be regarded as a materialisation of the intertwining between theatre, craftsmanship, and visual culture.
In Chapter VI a possible influence from the Arabic shadow theatre (*khāyāl al-zill*) in Venice’s puppet theatre manifestations has been argued, also bringing to the fore the unnoticed assonance between *Arlichin*, the full-face black mask of the *commedia dell’arte*, and *al-Rikhim*, a comparable stock role in the Arabic shadow theatre. Attention has also been drawn on the presence of a remarkable number of eighteenth-century Chinese characters in the marionette collections of the Ca’ Goldoni Museum and Davia Bargellini Museum, a presence that reflects Venice’s fascination with the East, particularly China in the first decades of the eighteenth century. At that time opera was gaining momentum in the *Serenissima* and in the *Celestial Empire* as well. The study that I made on the rare, unpublished eighteenth-century Chinese marionettes in the Museo del Burcardo, in Rome (Figs. 82-86) led to the discovery that these figures reproduce characters of the Chinese opera, or *jingju*, which rose to fame in Peking (Beijing) starting from the mid-sixteenth century, when opera theatres flourished in Venice. In both these contexts opera evidently was a source of inspiration for marionette theatre. From a theatrical standpoint, and also under the lens of visual culture and history of collecting, the existence of coeval rod-and-string puppets from Venice and China that were used to perform operatic productions in the secular domain, principally in domestic theatres, provides the basis for cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary analysis. Some comparisons between the Chinese and Venetian puppets under examination have been made focusing principally on their construction and dimensions, which are similar. Another element in common is the presence of myth, stock characters, and figures portraying aristocrats, servants, judges, men at arms and much more in different, yet comparable ways. Another analogy lies in the preciousness of the costumes, suggesting that in both Venice and China marionette theatres belonged to wealthy patrons and collectors. I hope that in future I may have the possibility to further expand this comparative analysis of Venetian and Chinese puppets collaborating with a *jingju* specialist, so that we may undertake a more
thorough study spanning history, iconography, performance, and visual culture of the eastern and western worlds.

In Chapter VII a ‘complete picture’ of puppet theatre in the open-air spaces of Settecento Venice has been offered relating visual and written evidence of the shows performed by a Venetian puppeteer called ‘il Borgogna’ (Fig. 94). While Gradenigo and Grevembroch’s writings as well as Longhi’s depictions of these shows are known to most puppet theatre specialists, the same cannot be said for Borgogna’s figures, some of which he inherited from his onetime rival, Ottavio Paglialonga. The account reported in this dissertation is illustrated with the images of the only two examples of Paglialonga’s puppets that are extant in Parma, Museo Castello dei Burattini Giordano Ferrari (Figs. 95-96).

I have attempted to follow as much as possible a chronological thread, but drew comparisons with art forms originating in different cultural areas or brought to the fore reminiscences from the past. I tried to present this historical reconstruction as an engaging account that would not turn the memory of an entertaining art form into the sterile analysis of its ‘faint reflection’. Outlining Venice’s puppet theatre forms sometimes required a little bit of imagination because in some cases the ‘original’ is absent. Scores and libretti of puppet operas have survived but the tuning of certain instruments is unknown, as is the sound of the castrato voice singers. Of the mythic theatre of Cardinal Ottoboni nothing remains but its stage designs by Filippo Juvarra. Of Filippo Acciaiuoli’s puppets, whose construction perhaps incorporated the rod-and-spring devices characterising Asian figures, no examples have survived. What we do have, however, is an invaluable heritage of dramatic figures of different epochs, scenery, scores, plays, and memoirs that offer a gleam of Venice’s character, its passion for

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4 In recent years a team of professors and scientists tried to match electronically certain elements of the only recording of a castrato voice, that of Alessandro Moreschi, with elements of a tenor and treble voice. This experiment followed the well-known attempted regeneration of the castrato voice made for the film ‘Farinelli’, in that case morphing a soprano and countertenor voice. See the documentary ‘Castrato – in Search of a Lost Voice’ made by the BBC 4 Producer Francesca Kemp in 2005.
coexisting opposites: East and West, reality and illusion, naturalism and artifice, and
aristocratic views on everyday life like those depicted by Canaletto. Indeed, his paintings
well represent puppet theatre, a multifaceted genre in between popular and literary
traditions, steeped in the contemporary spirit and also incorporating heritage from
the past, portraying reality, and yet arousing imagination about fabled realms.
Tables
Table 1: Puppet operas staged in Venice in the seventeenth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title:</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Libretto:</th>
<th>Score:</th>
<th>Venue:</th>
<th>Type of figures:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Il Leandro</em></td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>Camillo Badoer</td>
<td>F. A. Pistocchi (lost)</td>
<td>Ca' Vendramin Teatro alle Zattere</td>
<td>Marionettes (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Dimora plebea</em></td>
<td>1680</td>
<td>Filippo Acciaiuoli</td>
<td>M. A. Ziani</td>
<td>Teatro San Moisé</td>
<td>Marionettes (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I Ulisse in Francia</em></td>
<td>1681</td>
<td>Filippo Acciaiuoli</td>
<td>Antonio del Gaudioso (lost)</td>
<td>Teatro San Moisé</td>
<td>Marionettes (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gli amori Fatali</em> (Il Leandro)</td>
<td>1682</td>
<td>Filippo Acciaiuoli</td>
<td>F. A. Pistocchi (lost)</td>
<td>Teatro San Moisé</td>
<td>Marionettes (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Il Girello</em></td>
<td>1682</td>
<td>Filippo Acciaiuoli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marionettes (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Scenes
- Temple dedicated to Venus in Sesto.
- Temple’s courtyard.
- Shore and harbour of the city of Abido (wood and view of the sea).
- Royal gardens with flower arcour and beautiful hills.
- Lucilla’s room near Tigrane’s apartments.
- Sumptuous gallery.
- Gallery.
- Sea shore and view of the temple’s tower of the city of Sesto.
- Elysian fields.
- Wood with a hut.
- Fillide’s bedroom at court.
- Royal court.
- Royal garden.
- Royal room, with painting showing the wreckage of Daminio’s ship.
- Royal loggia.
- Delightful place in the Royal residence facing the River Nile.
- Dreadful prison.
- Fillide’s apartments at court.
- Bushes and shore with turbulent sea.
- Royal apartments.
- Delightful garden.
- Royal apartments.
- Delightful loggias.
- Atrium leading to the Royal apartments.
- Laurus hedge and fountains.
- Nereids lifting Leandro from the waves.
- Elysian fields.

### Place of action
- Temple of Sesto, Abido’s court and surroundings.
- Egypt.
- Phaeacia.
- See *Il Leandro*.
- Thebes (Egypt).

### Scenic machines
- Figures:
  - Venus in a cloud.
  - Natalie lifting Leandro from the waves in a shell with coral and pearls.
  - Amorini, flying from the sky to take Leandro up into the clouds.
  - Venus on her starry chariot surrounded by amorini.
  - Leandro and Hero on bright clouds.
  - Hero’s transformation into a laurus tree.
  - Cupid’s flight.
  - Two amorini pulling down the curtain.

### Deus ex machina
- Minerva in machina.

### BALLE
- BALLE I: Hunters with Arbae.
- BALLE II: Maidervants with Lucilla.
- Ballard: Dance of the Amorini.
- Ballard: Dance of the gardener’s daughters.
- Maiders around an altar.

### Dumb figures
- Guards with Tigrane.
- Amorini and Venus.

### Characters
- **Singing figures**
  - Tigrane lord of Abido.
  - Leandro, Tigrane’s master in love with Hero.
  - Hero, virgin consecrated to Venus in the temple Sesto and Leandro’s lover, who also dresses up as Belserina, the dark haired Gipsy.
  - Lesa, Hero’s custodian.
  - Lucilla, Tigrane’s lascivious friend.
  - Arbae, Tigrane’s secretary in love with Lucilla.
  - Giucasta, Lucilla’s nurse.
  - Millo, Leandro’s ridiculous servant.
  - Damira, Creonte’s wife dressed up as a shepherdess and calls herself Fidalba.
  - Creonte king of Egypt.
  - Fillide, Creonte’s favourite.
  - Nigrane, knight.
  - Bremo, captain of Egypt.
  - Nerillo, eunuch, Fillide’s servant.
  - Silo, farmer.
  - Lerinda, Silo’s wife.
  - Akinoo, King of Thrace.
  - Almira and Cirene, the The King’s daughters.
  - Prince Ormindo, in love with Cirene.
  - Ulisse, Prince of Phaeacia and chief of the Greeks.
  - Defio, ridiculous bunched-backed servant of Ulisse.
  - Lisa, old nurse.

- **Group of people**
  - Odoardo, King of Thebes.
  - Erminda, daughter of the King of Cyprus and Odoardo’s wife.
  - Dorelio, Odoardo’s sister.
  - Mustado, the slave, Erminda’s brother.
  - Filone, pendant councillor.
  - Iantea, Dorelio’s nurse.
  - Girello, court gardener and Iantea’s husband.
  - Stilano the jailer.
  - Socrer.
Table 2: Documented puppet operas staged in Venice and Padua in the 18th century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Librettist</th>
<th>Scenery</th>
<th>Costume</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Type of figures</th>
<th>Performers</th>
<th>Place of action</th>
<th>Scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sneeze of Hercules</td>
<td>1746</td>
<td>Pietro Jacopo Martello</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>Natale Canziani</td>
<td>Square of Polimicra, with magnificent palaces, esplanade statue at the centre, and throne to the right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurimende e Timocleone</td>
<td>1746</td>
<td>Girolamo Zanetti</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>N. Canziani</td>
<td>Royal Gardens with statues and a fountain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il Cajetto</td>
<td>1747</td>
<td>Antonio Gori</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>N. Canziani</td>
<td>Royal Gardens with statues and a fountain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didone Abbandonata</td>
<td>1747</td>
<td>Apostolo Zeno</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>N. Canziani</td>
<td>Royal Gardens with statues and a fountain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giunone</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>A. Zeno (adaptation)</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Girolamo</td>
<td>Marionettes</td>
<td>F. Canziani</td>
<td>Royal Gardens with statues and a fountain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of action</th>
<th>Scenes</th>
<th>Machines</th>
<th>Optic devices</th>
<th>Dress ex machina</th>
<th>Balls/Choirs</th>
<th><em>Actors</em> (singing figures)</th>
<th>Orfeo ed Euridice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The land of Pygmies, who live at the source of the River Nile, on the last mounts of India, enjoying a mild climate.</em></td>
<td><em>Square of Polimicra,</em> with magnificent palaces, esplanade statue at the centre, and throne to the right.</td>
<td><em>Transformable scenery (motion).</em></td>
<td><em>Fading rainbow.</em></td>
<td><em>Transformable scenery.</em></td>
<td>Choir of 4 characters.</td>
<td>Hercules (hand only)</td>
<td>Lake Avenus (with grove leading to the underworld in classical antiquity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Courtyard of Royal Palace.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Romet, King of the Pygmies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ncr, daughter of the king and Hercules’ lover.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has, Ncr’s twin sister in love with Oce.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Octe, Prince of the dwarfs, in love with Ncr.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vas, General, in love with Has, ntrs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Iphigania, regent Queen of Armenia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ariadne, her daughter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Comparison between the *libretti* of *Orpheo ed Euridice* staged in Venice with live actors, and Padua, presumably with figures, in 1776.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the opera:</th>
<th>Orfeo ed Euridice</th>
<th>Orfeo ed Euridice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of Performance:</td>
<td>Summer 1776</td>
<td>2 May 1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libretto:</td>
<td>Ferdinando Batoni</td>
<td>Ferdinando Batoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td>Mauri</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenery:</td>
<td>Venice, Teatro San Benedetto</td>
<td>Padua, Unidentified Academia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue:</td>
<td>Live performers</td>
<td>Marionettes of G. Guadagni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of figures</td>
<td>Guadagni, Zamperini, Cupola</td>
<td>Guadagni, Piatti, Nazzolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of action</th>
<th>Unspecified</th>
<th>Lake Avernus (with grove leading to the underworld in classical antiquity) for unity of space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT I</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Delightful, yet solitary wood with laurel and cypresses, and tomb of Euridice.</td>
<td>Delightful, yet solitary wood with laurel and cypresses, and statue of Euridice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>The same scene, with Hymen.</td>
<td>The same scene, with Love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Dreadful grove beyond the river Cocytus, with fire and smoke.</td>
<td>Dreadful grove beyond the river Cocytus, with fire and smoke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Elysian fields with delightful trees and flowers.</td>
<td>Elysian fields with delightful trees and flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>Dreadful grove.</td>
<td>Elysian fields with delightful trees and flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>Magnificent Palace of Love with Corinthian architecture and delightful views on hills and woods</td>
<td>Magnificent Palace of Love with Corinthian architecture and delightful views on hills and woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT II</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Elysian fields with delightful trees and flowers.</td>
<td>Elysian fields with delightful trees and flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Dreadful woods forming a labyrinth with rocks and wild bushes.</td>
<td>Dreadful woods forming a labyrinth with rocks and wild bushes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>The same scene with Cupid.</td>
<td>The same scene with Cupid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Machines</th>
<th>Optic devices</th>
<th>— Machine to create flame effects.</th>
<th>— Machine to create flame effects.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BALLS</td>
<td>BALLS with 38 dancers</td>
<td>Shepherds and Nymphs</td>
<td>Furies and Ghosts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Furies and Ghosts</td>
<td>Heroes and Heroines</td>
<td>Orpheus’ Followers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shepherds and Nymphs</td>
<td>Heroes and Heroines</td>
<td>Orpheus’ Followers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHOIRS</td>
<td>CHOIR of 3-5 singers with figures</td>
<td>Shepherds and Nymphs</td>
<td>Furies and Ghosts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Furies and Ghosts</td>
<td>Heroes and Heroines</td>
<td>Orpheus’ Followers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shepherds and Nymphs</td>
<td>Heroes and Heroines</td>
<td>Orpheus’ Followers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>Singers:</td>
<td>— Orfeo, the bard of Thrace.</td>
<td>— Orfeo, the bard of Thrace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Orfeo, the bard of Thrace.</td>
<td>- Euridice, his spouse.</td>
<td>- Euridice, his spouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Imene (Hymen).</td>
<td>- Amore (Love).</td>
<td>- Amore (Love).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singing figures:</td>
<td>— Ombra (shadow, or ghost).</td>
<td>— Plutone (Pluto)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dumb figures:</th>
<th>— Ombra (shadow, or ghost).</th>
<th>— Plutone (Pluto)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 4: Prospect showing the matches between the settings in Guadagni’s marionette theatre, and the scenes described in the *libretti* of puppet operas performed in Padua and Venice in the eighteenth century.

Legend: √ = present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUADAGNI’S MARIONETTE THEATRE (inventory)</th>
<th>PADUA, 1782-4</th>
<th>VENICE, CA’ LABIA, TEATRO SAN GIROLAMO, 1746-1748</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orfeo ed Eufidice</td>
<td>Lo Starnuto d’Ercole</td>
<td>Eurimedonte e Timoleone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grove with cypresses</td>
<td>Delightful, yet solitary wood with laurel and cypresses</td>
<td>Sacred wood with a sacrificial pyre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferno (hell), or cave with two gauze drops as part of lighting apparatus</td>
<td>Dreadful grove beyond the river Cocytus, with fire and smoke.</td>
<td>Lit background behind verdure and a set of arches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elysian fields with three arches to create perspective distance</td>
<td>Elysian fields with delightful trees and flowers.</td>
<td>Lit background behind verdure and a set of arches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark cave</td>
<td>Dreadful cave.</td>
<td>Dark cave, which turns into the temple of Apollo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple of Love</td>
<td>Square of the city of Polimicra.</td>
<td>Square of the city of Agra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piazza (square)</td>
<td>Hall of mirrors.</td>
<td>Hall of mirrors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piazza with columnade</td>
<td>Atrium leading to apartments.</td>
<td>Atrium leading to apartments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atrium in a Royal palace and great hall, both with mirrors</td>
<td>Atrium leading to apartments.</td>
<td>Atrium leading to apartments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnificent garden with fountains</td>
<td>Royal Gardens with statues and a fountain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Frightful wood with rocks and bushes forming a labyrinth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encampment with pavilions</td>
<td>Fields encampment of an army to the left, and army passing a bridge to the right towards a city in the distance.</td>
<td>Fields encampment of an army to the left, and army passing a bridge to the right towards a city in the distance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>Dark cave, which turns into the temple of Apollo</td>
<td>Sea Harbour with ships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea scene</td>
<td>Sea harbour with ships.</td>
<td>Sea Harbour with ships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>Dark prison.</td>
<td>Gothic temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>---</strong></td>
<td><strong>---</strong></td>
<td><strong>---</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine to produce flame effects</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanism to produce water effects</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine transforming a tower into a whale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine dissolving a prison into a delightful temple</td>
<td>Dark cave, which turns into the temple of Apollo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGIC LANTERN</td>
<td>Dissolving rainbow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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