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Puppets were the protagonists of one of the most popular Italian theatrical genres between the 19th and 20th centuries and, with reference to Sicily, Puppet Opera/*Opera dei Pupi* was recognized by UNESCO in 2008 as part of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity. In dictionaries and specialized encyclopedias, as well as many scientific and non-scientific publications concerning the puppet theater, puppets have typically been considered as a merely folkloristic expression of a minor theatrical genre, specifically dedicated to child audiences.

However, one only needs to analyze the phenomenon from the lexicographic and linguistic point of view to understand its richness and complexity. This clearly emerges when lexicographical, linguistic and philological analyses of the term are extended to include the comparative study of terminological occurrences and the historical trajectory of this theatrical form.

Etymology.

“Pupo”, which derives from the Latin *pupus-pupi*, the same root as *puer*, *pusus*, and *putus*, means child, but also, particularly in the Roman dialect, small child, infant. *Pupa* means in Latin the “little girl”, but also her “soul” which, luminous, crosses the “pupil” (diminutive of *pupa*) of the eye. And also her “doll”. Some scholars trace the term to *pupae*, the small terracotta dolls with jointed limbs found in ancient Roman tombs (such as the ivory one found in the sarcophagus of the young Crepereia Tryphaena) and which, besides having a playful function, also seem to have had magical-sacral functions. The same derivation can be seen in English term *puppet* and the German *puppe*, terms indifferently used with reference to marionettes, puppets, children’s dolls.

Since the Roman era, *pupo* has also been used as a synonym for *fantoccino* and was initially used in this sense by Varro (*Saturae Menippeae*, 4 *pupa*) and by Arnobius (*Adversus Nationes*, 7.8 *pupulus*).

It is obviously a generic term, also used, then as now, as a synonym of toy puppet or figurine, doll, or even puppet or *fantoccino* («miniature puppet»).

Not by chance were (and still are) the babies, their dolls, ornamental plaster, wood, ceramic or terracotta figurines, terracotta figurines for the nativity scene, sweets and the prepared breads especially on specific religious recurrences called *pupi* in Sicily. Also called puppets are the *pupiddi ri zuccaru* («*pupi* made of sugar») or *pupaccena* («*pupi* at dinner») linked to the commemoration of the dead, the ‘*a pupiddu* biscuits of the feast of Saints Cosma and Damiano, the typical bread *pupiddi* of the feast of San Giuseppe, ‘*u panuzzu a pupiddu* («small *pupo*-shaped bread»), also known as *pupo cull’ova* (*pupo* with egg), linked to the Easter celebrations, the *pupo of San Calogero*, the *pupa of Murriali* (Monreale), and the *pupi di Sangiuvanni*.

Pupi armati.

The *pupi*, which this section deals with, are the armed *marionette* (shields, armor, leg protection, helmets and plumes, swords [or scimitars if Saracens], etc.) introduced in the first half of the nineteenth century in the South of Italy.

Destined from birth to mainly chivalrous repertoires, these *marionette* gave birth to one of the most popular and most widespread theatrical forms (with its own traditions and schools) in southern Italy for at least a century. While in very many cases the *pupi* were the only form of culture of the lower classes, they were also cultivated and loved by aristocrats, bourgeois and intellectuals.

These *marionette* were made of wood with a main metal rod that crossing through the head and hooking onto the trunk, an iron (or two strings) on the righthand wrist and a thread on the other. The puppet “family” had roots and “exponents” (according to some, ancestors,

and according to others, descendants) in Rome, Naples and its province, Puglia, Calabria, Basilicata, and even in Belgium, mainly in Brussels and Liège.

The debate surrounding the birth of *pupi* is still an unresolved historiographical issue and source of contention between two cities on the same island (Palermo and Catania) and between two regions under Bourbons rule at one time (Sicily and Campania).

The three (main) geographic areas of this art form, corresponding to as many traditions and schools, are: the Palermo school, which includes its various expressions in western Sicily; the Catania school which extends from eastern Sicily to Calabria; and the Neapolitan school which includes Campania, Puglia, and Basilicata (in central Italy is the Roman school which, despite several elements in common with the above-mentioned main traditions, seems, to date, to have its own, independent, history).

In all geographical regions the central repertoire focused on the history of the paladins of France and presented in daily performance cycles for a total duration ranging from six months to a year and a half. In addition, the shared elements of these traditions were: the oral matrix of their origin (in Sicily the *cuntisti*, in Campania, the *rinaldi*); the social, cultural and political dimension – i.e. belonging to the *pòlis* and, in particular, the peasant and proletarian subordination that, in this theater, reflected a deep thirst for justice and a rebalancing of society in which the peasants were the vanquished, the oppressed, and the “usurped”; and finally, though not in order of importance, the social role of the *puparo* (or «puppet master», called *oprante-puparo* in western Sicily, *pupante* in the Campania tradition). In most cases this figure was the only cultural point of reference of “his people”, who called him *don*, and, by attributing to him the aura of “master” and authority on chivalry, recognized him as the official bearer of this knowledge. He dispelled doubts, settled questions, harmonized apparently contradictory facts and educated his audiences on the honors of chivalry through his puppet characters. For its public, this theater always embodied much more than a mere universe of pure escape: the history of the French Royalty represented shared knowledge, the knightly deeds represented a poetic and behavioral universe, and the tradition of the puppets was in continuity with the family life. The theater was, in a word, a factor of cultural identity.

Each macro tradition and school obviously had their differences which made up the very essence of their richness: each difference was, in fact, an expression of the beliefs, values, faith and culture of its specific public.

Each tradition used different types of *marionette*: the ones in Palermo measuring ninety centimeters from the head to foot and weighing 8 to 12 kilos, while those in Catania, like the Neapolitan ones, were one meter thirty tall and weighed between 25 and 35 kilos. These differences determined the characteristics of their maneuverability, acting, voices, stage and theatre dimensions (in Catania, as in the Neapolitan tradition, real theaters which in the period of the first crisis of the *Opera dei Pupi*, lent their space to the variety shows), and also in the size and layout of the posters outside the theaters advertising scheduled shows.

Each school had a different tradition regarding the construction and animation of its *pupi*. Given their size, in Catania and Naples the *pupi* had padded wooden skeletons, while in Palermo their bodies and legs were made of solid wood, had articulated knees (they could kneel and horse ride, like the Neapolitan puppets), a mobile left arm that could raise and lower a visor and, like those from Naples, sheathe and unsheathe a sword, which was not attached to their hands. The Catania *pupi*, on the other hand, had rigid knees (the saying «a true paladin never kneels», is still used in the Catania area to this very day), and they always held a sword. Their dimensions, like those, of the Neapolitan tradition, required maneuvering from above and a particular stage structure. While in Palermo scenic depth was used and the *pupi* were maneuvered from the sides (the *oprante-puparo* and his helpers were hidden in the side scenes of the stage and rested their feet on the same level as the puppets), in the Catania area (as in the Neapolitan area) the *pupi* were moved from above, from a bridge called “scannappoggio” / *scannappoggiu* or “barrone” / *barruni* (placed behind the scene on a plane about one meter higher than the stage) which was necessary to avoid

the operators from over-balancing to the front due to the significant weight of the *marionetta*. The *oprante-puparo* in Palermo and the *pupante* in the Neapolitan theatre maneuvering the *pupi* managed to both control and give them voices – and, as such acted as the *deus ex machina* of the show as they moved and made the *pupi* “talk” while simultaneously coordinating the movements of the other puppeteers, the lights, the scenes and music. In contrast, in eastern Sicily, due to the greater weight of the *pupi*, “word” and “maneuver” belonged to different roles: there were the *manianti* who move the *pupi* from the top of the *scannappoggiu* and the *parraturi* (“parlatori”) or “reciters” who give them their voice.

Finally, unlike western Sicily where, in the past, all the various roles and functions tended to exclude female presence, and which, when admitted, was relegated to ticket window at the theater entrance or the creation of *marionette* costumes, in the Neapolitan and Catanian traditions women had *ruoli pupari* («puppet roles») from the beginning: since the end of the eighteenth century in Naples there were puppeteer women, and often also heads of companies and contractors. In Eastern Sicily, where the acting tradition also included the distinction between male and female reciters (the *parraturi* lending their voices to male characters, and the *parratrici*, “speaking” the female ones).

Origins, occurrences and references of the term.

The first theatrical reference to the term *pupo* was regional and pertained to the Sicilian language which is a valuable language as it remained isolated for centuries within the geographical perimeter of the island. Among the definitions of the entry *pupa* in Antonino Traina’s *Nuovo Vocabolario Siciliano Italiano* (1868) we read «[...] “pupu”: que’ fantocci da teatro: *burattini*, o se meglio fatti: *marionette*» [“pupu”: those theater puppets, or if better made: *marionettes*].

The term is also indicated in previous dictionaries, but without any theater reference. This is the entry in the Traina vocabulary just quoted: «“pupu”: *s.m.* di PUPA: *fantoccio*. || *Figura* dipinta o disegnata alla peggio: *bamboccio*. || ESSIRI UN PUPU DI PEZZA, *fig.*, essere sciocco, soro: *bamboccio*, *fantoccione*. || *Fantoccio* di cenci che si mette ne’ campi seminati per ispaurire gli uccelli: *spauracchio*. || – DI JUSSU, *figurina* di gesso: *stucchino*. || – CULL’OVU, *pasta* in varie forme, con un uovo sodo dentro, che s’usa per Pasqua: *colombina* (*Rigutini*). || PUPU LORDU, si dice di un sudicio (in *Lat.* *pupus* valeva fanciullo)». («“pupu”: *s.m.* of PUPA: *puppet*. || badly painted or drawn figure: *bamboccio*. || TO BE A PUPU OF PEPLE, *fig.*, To be a fool, a dumb: a nag, a puppet. || Rags puppet that is put in the sown fields to scare the birds: *bogeyman*. || – DI JUSSU, *plaster figurine*: *stucchino*. || – CULL’OVU, *pasta* in various forms, with a hard-boiled egg inside, which is used for Easter: *colombina* (*Rigutini*). || PUPU LORDU, it is said of a messy (in *Lat.* *Pupus* meant child)»).

However, the theatrical meaning of the term is older and recorded from the middle of the eighteenth century in its diminutive use *pupiddu* in the *Dizionario Siciliano Italiano Latino Del Padre Michele Del Bono Della Compagnia Di Gesù* («Sicilian Italian Latin Vocabulary of Father Michele Del Bono of the Society of Jesus») (1751-1754). Under the heading «pùpo e pupu», which makes no theatrical reference, we find the dialectal occurrence of the term, *pupiddu*: «specialmente dicesi quel fantoccio di cenci, o legni, di cui si vagliono i ciarlatani a rappresentar le commedie. *burattino*. *neurospaton* («especially those that are referred to as rags, or wood(s), which charlatans use to represent puppet comedies. *burratino*. *neurospaton*)» and following: «jocu di pupiddi dicesi la commedia rappresentata con tali fantocci. *burattini*. *comoedia ludicris automatis*, *feu sigillis exhibita*» («jocu of pupiddi is called the comedy represented with such puppets. *puppets*. *comoedia ludicris automatis*, *feu sigillis exhibita*»).

The (successive) compilers of Sicilian dictionaries (Pasqualino, Mortillaro and Biundi) will behave in the same way for over a century, noting theatrical references only for the item *pupiddu*.

From its first appearance with theatrical reference, i.e. from the *pupiddu* of Del Bono onwards, the term was treated, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century, as a

“generic” synonym of *burattino*. Even in the 1958 *Dizionario Enciclopedico Italiano Treccani* entry «pupo» (which, by the way, is absent in the first edition of the *Enciclopedia Treccani* [1929–1937]) we read: «“pupo”: marionetta, burattino». Moreover, until the second half of the nineteenth century, the terms *burattino* and *marionetta* were used interchangeably, without considering the problem of their technical distinction.

To be more precise, at least according to the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, the definition of *burattino* is more ancient and is already present in the third edition of the *vocabolario dei vocabolari* («vocabulary of the vocabularies»), the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, (1691), while *marionetta* appears only in the fifth edition (1863–1923) and, moreover, also as a synonym for *burattino*. It is interesting to note that the first definition that the *Vocabolario della Crusca* gives of *burattino* (1691) is the one that will be adopted, almost verbatim, by Del Bono for *pupiddu* (1754): «*quel fantoccio di cenci, o legno, con molti de’ quali rappresentano i ciarlatani, o simili, varie commedie per adunar le brigate*» («that puppet made of rags, or wood, with many of whom they represent the charlatans, or similar, various comedies to gather together the brigades»).

Moreover, in the terminology there has always been much, so much so that even today the two words are used indifferently; many improperly use the term *burattini* to refer to the *marionette* which are animated from above using strings. Thus, for example, Carlo Collodi used the word *burattino* to refer to his Pinocchio (*Le Avventure di Pinocchio: storia di un burattino* [1883]), while Pinocchio is, without a shadow of a doubt, a *marionetta* (even if he moves without strings at the end); hence the fact that today, in the children’s literature of some countries, *burattino* is synonymous with Pinocchio: for example the Russian Aleksej Nikolaevič Tolstoj’s remake of Collodi’s work with the story *Zolotoj ključik ili prikľjučenijia Buratino* (*Il compagno Pinocchio* or *Buratino e la chiavetta magica*, 1st ed. 1936) by the Russian Aleksej Nikolaevič Tolstoj.

The terminological distinction between *marionette* and *burattino* pertains only to Italian culture. In the rest of the world the terms used to define *marionette* and *burattino* are the same and to the different terms does not correspond any technical difference: the French term *marionnette* corresponds to both *marionette* and *burattino*; the same for the German *puppe*, the English *puppet*, and the Spanish *títere*.

Even recently, when the distinction between *burattino* and *marionetta* had been definitively established, the theatrical use of *pupiddu* / *pupu* / *pupo* seems to have remained indistinct. However, this should not surprise us given that almost all the lexicographers, in addition to classifying the term as synonymous with *burattino*, spoke of a «figure made of rags or wood» without giving any preference to either of the two materials. This was also found in the Sicilian reality of the period when the *pupi* («rudimentary puppets») were publicly seen for the first time. In the wording used on requests to the Bourbon police to «entertain the public with *pupiddi* or *fantocci*» the specified material was almost always given as either wood or rags.

A further indication, which points to further consideration, is the *a filo* («by string») specification which was very frequent in these requests, though not yet pertinent to the issue of the *burattino* / *marionetta* distinction:

a) it is no coincidence that both Del Bono and Pasqualino, the first two lexicographers to record the theatrical occurrences of the term *burattino*, note that the Greek terms *neurospasta* and *neurospaston*, both composed from the noun *néuron*, meaning “nerve”, “tendon”, and the verb *spàō* meaning “to pull” (the *marionette* were in fact operated by means of animal nerves), were used by Herodotus (*Stories*, 2.48.2) and by Xenophon (*Symposium*, 4.55) with the meaning of «*marionetta* moved by means of strings». De Bono refers to the Greek term directly, while Pasqualino indirectly refers to Horace: «*burattino, pupa, nervis alienis mobile lignum* Hor.». It might be said that this is a contradiction in terms since the *burattini* have no strings and therefore one “specification” seems to cancel the other. However, it should be remembered that this was in an age when the distinction between *burattini* and *marionette* had not yet been established;

b) the first direct reference to the *Opera dei Pupi*, shortly after the first occurrence of the term *pupo* in a theatrical context in Traina's *Nuovo Vocabolario*, appears through the formula *pupi affilu* which Antonio Palomes used in his *La Storia di li Nurmanni 'n Sicilia* («The History of the Normans in Sicily») (1882-1887) to indicate the «well-known Sicilian marionette representing characters in the age of chivalry».

Terminological issues.

The first conclusions to draw from the comparative analysis of the occurrences of the terms in question is that, in all probability, in the mid-eighteenth century the practice of representations with what today would be called rudimentary *pupi* had been consolidated and the term *pupiddu* became permanent in the various dictionaries: figurines of rags or wood, moved above all (but not exclusively) by means of strings. The terms *pupi* and *pupiddi* were synonyms, also on a “technical” level, of *burattini* or *fantoccini* found in the piazzas and fairs at the time.

As recorded, by Traina's vocabulary as well as the *Storia dei Normanni* («History of the Normans») of Palomes, from the late sixties of the nineteenth century the driving force behind the *Opera dei Pupi* had been transferred and consolidated in the serialized tales of the French paladins. However, this was clearly a theater which was almost exclusively recognized at only the regional level. Proof of this is the fact that the term *pupo* not only does not appear in any of the five editions of the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, but also in none of the Italian language dictionaries until 1917. Indeed, even an attentive scholar such as Tommaseo decided not to include it in his *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (1861-1879). *Pupo* is also absent in other important Italian language dictionaries (Fanfani, Panzini, and Pianigiani) and was to remain unmentioned until Nicola Zingarelli, in the first edition of his *Vocabolario* (1917), under the uses of *pupa* lists will record: «[...] “pupo”: pupazzo, fantoccio // dialettale: Marionetta // l'opera dei -».

In the period in which the *Opera dei pupi* was born and became established and consolidated as a theatrical genre in its own right, the Sicilian use of the word *pupi*, with specific reference to the *Opera dei pupi*, was ignored not only in the main and regional Italian dictionaries, but also in a publication specifically dedicated to what today we would call, with an imprecise ministerial neologism, “teatro di figura”: *La Storia dei Burattini* («The History of Puppets») written by Yorick in 1884.

Antonomatic issues.

It is also possible to follow, albeit broadly, the development of the *Opera dei Pupi* through various terms of reference that have been used over time. Like the term *pupiddu*, used for more than a century as a synonym of *burattino*, without any reference to the *Opera dei Pupi*, so too are the main ways of expressing the term *pupu* generally used as synonyms of *burattino*, *fantoccio*, or manipulated figure. The first to specify *Essiri un pupu i risca o essiri un pupu di pezza* was Pasqualino in *Vocabolario Siciliano Etimologico, Italiano, e Latino* («Sicilian Etymological, Italian, and Latin Vocabulary») (1785-1795), «it is said of a simple man, one who should be governed, and who does nothing on his own» (same meanings when referring to a *burattino*); «*pupu*», Giuseppe Trischitta Mangiò points out in his *Vocabolario Siciliano Italiano per Tutti* («Sicilian Italian Vocabulary for All») (1875-1930), also corresponds to a «straw man who is easily manipulated by others and especially by his wife»; *chi aiu u saccu chi pupi ca ti fazzu ririri?* instead, means «what are you laughing at, am I perhaps a *puparo*?».

There were, especially in the Sicilian area, numerous colorful ways of referring to the precise nature of the *Opera dei Pupi* which focused almost entirely on chivalrous traditions mainly linked to the stories of the paladins of France. These were recorded, above all, by Pitre in the course of his studies and further expanded upon by philologists and anthropologists: *immiscare 'a Francia ca' Spagna* means to try to unite distant subjects (literally, «to mix France with Spain»); *fari l'opra and/or fazzu l'opira* «to cause great confusion» (like the young people at the *Opera dei Pupi*, or «to make a scene»; *carricàrisi i pupi* («loading the

puppets») is used not only to indicate the acidity of the wine, but above all (and throughout the Trinacria, the three-legged symbol of Sicily) as a synonym of anger, rage, and obviously derives from the typical way the *marionette* “light up”, catching fire at the smallest provocation, so much so that even today the expression «*si càrrica i pupi!*» is still used to refer to people who are impulsive and unreflective.

There are thus numerous circumlocutions and the antonomastic expressions derived from the *pupi*’s world and from the chivalrous traditions to which they refer: *fàrinni quantu Carru ’n Francia* («to do as Charles does in France») for those who accomplish great and memorable enterprises; «to be» or «feel like *Rinardu di Muntarbanu*» (the character of the *Orlando Furioso* and of the *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Tasso employed as the protagonist of the *Opera dei Pupi* together with his cousin Orlando), to indicate, as noted by Pitрэ, «chi vuol far lo gnorri, chi braveggia»; «being *un carrumagno*» (Charlemagne) or even *Carrumagnu cu lu pugu chiusu* («Charlemagne with a clenched fist») meaning someone who is tight-fisted, who is said to be reflected in the closed fist with which the sovereign is said to be born and which every self-respecting “*pupo Carlomagno*” possesses among his physical characteristics; *parramu di re Carlu* (King Charles [Charlemagne]) is still used today to solicit a change of topic.

It is also interesting to note the transmigration of the personal names from the protagonists of the *Opera dei Pupi* to the Sicilian dialect, and which have become common names, adjectives and appellatives still used today, even on the “continent” (as the Sicilians called Italy at that time): *rodomonte*, from the Saracen warrior from Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato* who, like the *pupo* who represented him, was endowed with super-human strength and immeasurable pride, is used to refer to a haughty, violent and insolent person, who is arrogant and boastful of his own skill «to assert himself and instill fear» according to Pianigiani’s *Dizionario*, and, in the 2010 editions of the *Dizionario dei modi di dire* «to threaten or intimidate those considered weaker»; *re pippinu* (king Pippin) is an expression used to indicate a hunchback, like the *pupo* that represents him and which, in turn, was created in the image and likeness of the character described in the chivalric poems; *trusullina* (or *donna trusullina*) referred to a vulgar, gossipy and nosy woman, like the Drusiana (which tradition has transformed into Trusullina) who Buovo d’Antona searched for without rest; *cani di Maganza, magonzesi, o gano di magonza* recalls the traitor par excellence, the negative protagonist of the *Opera dei Pupi*, Count Gano of Magonza, and was considered the worst of all insults; *giganti farrauttu* (giant Ferraù) was said of a man who, like the child of the *Opera dei Pupi*, was «disproportionately tall and material» and whose actions reminded one of the Saracen giant from the chivalric poems who challenged the most valiant Christian champions, knocking them all down outside Orlando; *brunellu* was used to indicate a foolish and / or contemptible person and derives from the homonymous character of *Orlando innamorato* and *Furioso* who, as servant of the African king Agramante, had the genius for theft and seemed to live to accomplish his “marvelous” deeds; *malagigi*, Pitрэ notes, is «a nickname of a skinny, rigid priest, with a very short cassock, with *nicchio* [three-pointed hat] and glasses, who in his gait, in his speech, had something of a wizard about him» like the Rinaldo’s Christian cousin, a magician who was always ready to put his art in the service of paladins; *pilucani*, finally, is said to be a person who «goes looking and sniffing everywhere», like the *pupo* Pulicane, born of a woman and a Molossian dog and therefore half man half dog and used mainly to represent the events of Buovo d’Antona, who was endowed with a formidable nose, was a devoted protector of Christian heroes, killed by a lion and baptized on the point of death.

While these expressions have survived over time and, albeit locally, entered common parlance, the art from which they come has certainly undergone a gradual modification. However, there are those who, like the maestro Mimmo Cuticchio, succeeded in innovating this tradition by wisely keeping it alive through new and thrilling variations capable of maintaining the public’s interest well beyond regional and national boundaries.

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