Artisanal inventiveness

The dynamics of rewriting in the plays of northern Italian puppeteers (19th-20th century)[1]

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1. Authorship, from adaptation to rewriting

Let us forget the script as we are used to understand it, with the author's name followed by the list of characters. The *copione* for puppet theatre has its own peculiar characteristics. The text is written in a large, often ruled notebook, with worn corners from the many times fingers turned the pages during the show. It has the list of characters, but also that of the "*trovarob(b)e*", i.e. the props and special effects (fires, flares…) needed for the performance. First and foremost, it often lacks an author. At the turn of the 19th and early 20th century, puppet theatre in Italy had a largely anonymous repertoire. The plays for puppets were rarely signed by an author and, even if they were, there was no certainty that the signatory was actually the author of the text. In fact, he could simply be the copyist, the one who had copied a pre-existing text, perhaps because the previous notebook was consumed and damaged, or to fix on the page what the puppeteer entrusted to his oral practice. To what extent, then, the copyists could indulge in changes to the copied text is unknown. Everything was, of course, written and copied by hand. So many mistakes, so many misspellings, so many alterations… In addition to that, the big notebook followed the wandering puppeteer in all his travels from one village to another. Each village, a different audience. Each audience, a joke to be adjusted. A line would be drawn, and the new phrase would be written beside it.

> Copione means, literally, a large notebook, in which, in beautiful handwriting, one text was copied from another, which was in turn copied from yet another,

and so on, until arriving at a *first one* that is difficult to trace. A *first* that lived through its performances and spread, by virtue of the consensus of the spectators, to many companies. [...] the journey of these scripts from one company to another determines their variants, so one can say that a copy is never a mere transcription, but almost always an adaptation (Moretti 2004, 41).[2]

In this continuous work dictated by public favour, in this rehashing from hand to hand, the importance of that first "original" script is lost to make way for its countless "adaptations". According to Jurkowski, it is precisely in the feature of adaptation that the specificity of puppets' playwriting lies:

> Usually, it is the spirit of adaptation that dominates. Here we come to the specificity of the puppet theatre text: it lies in this dynamic of dramatic and stylistic transformation that gives it its identity, because it is a characteristic feature of the genre. In this sense, drama for puppet theatre is as creative as other literary genres (Jurkowski 1991, 350).[3]

Is it possible, however, to speak of "adaptation"? Effectively, public and private archives containing puppet scripts are full of *copioni* based on the same stories. During the 19th century, the main sources of these adaptations were stories from the Bible and the lives of saints, Elizabethan dramas, bourgeois melodramas, chivalric tales, opera *librettos* or other theatrical dramas such as *Faust*, whose tradition spread from Germany to the whole of Europe becoming perhaps the greatest "classic" of the puppet repertoire, along with other fundamental works that circulated throughout Europe (*Don Juan*[4]) or were essential to a country's repertoire (*La Tentation*

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[2] "Copione significa, alla lettera, un grosso quaderno, nel quale, con bella grafia, si è copiato un testo che è stato a sua volta copiato da un altro ancora e così via, fino ad arrivare a un primo ben difficilmente rintracciabile. Un primo che ha avuto vita di spettacolo e si diffonde, in forza del consenso degli spettatori, presso molte compagnie. [...] il viaggio di questi copioni da una compagnia all'altra ne determina le varianti, per cui si può dire che una copia non è mai una mera trascrizione, ma quasi sempre è un adattamento". Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

[3] "habituellement, c'est l'esprit d'adaptation qui domine. Nous touchons ici à la spécificité du texte pour le théâtre de marionnettes : elle réside dans cette dynamique de transformation dramatique et stylistique qui lui confère son identité car elle est un trait caractéristique du genre. En ce sens, le drame pour théâtre de marionnettes est aussi créatif que les autres genres littéraires".

[4] For an in-depth discussion of the character of Don Juan in Central European puppet theatre, see Boutan 2023, 3-22. For its diffusion in Italian territory, see Leydi and Mezzanotte Leydi 1958, 266 et seq. See also Menarini 1985, 3-84.

de saint Antoine in France[5]). However, this may not be sufficient to identify the specificity of writing for puppets in the process of adaptation. Indeed, much of the theatre literature in general lies in adaptation: of novels, of films, of real events… The entire history of artistic creation is traversed by the movement between novel and theatre, narrative and ballet, theatre and opera, etc. In this movement, one must avoid believing that the same content can simply change format without being transformed itself, within itself. This applies even more to texts for puppet theatre, where very different plots can often be found under the same title. The companies would stay for several months in the same area, and the audience's attention had to be drawn to well-known, catchy titles, even if the actual show did not follow the expected plot. Rather than adaptation, therefore, I would use the term of rewriting, which can entail profound alterations with respect to an "original" that puppeteers did not scruple to betray.

Yet, attention must be paid to a further specification. The method of composing a professional script for puppets in the Italian theatre system of the 19th century was not that of writing. The *copioni* did not originate in written form, but rather were the offspring of orality. Puppeteers, as well as wandering actors and comedians, learned a craft (more than an art), directly through their family, watching, listening and assimilating what they were taught orally. They retained the plot, probably the best jokes, and appropriated them in their own way. Therefore, the script was first and foremost a medium on which to fix a partial memory, a working tool for the representation. Its literary nature was not the overriding element within a theatre system that had to be economically self-supporting: "the originality of the subject is replaced by the originality of its appropriation: which is not only an operation of reduction or adaptation, but is the search for and implementation of productive strategies in favour of staging"[6] (Cipolla 2021). The need to meet the tastes of the public on the one hand, and an oral memory that is first betrayal and re-appropriation on the other hand, explain the many mispronunciations, the constant changes that the same story could undergo from one play to another. Although a considerable number of puppet shows in Europe up until the end of the 19th century contained a preponderant proportion of text, the fact that they belonged to a theatrical form linked to orality meant that the words

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[5] See Plassard 2020.
[6] "all'originalità del soggetto si sostituisce l'originalità del suo appropriamento: che non è solo operazione di riduzione o adattamento, ma è ricerca e messa in atto di strategie produttive a favore della messa in scena".

spoken by the puppets and their animators were rarely fixed on paper. Furthermore, the appropriation of different textual materials, the reinterpretation of handed-down stories, variations and improvisations have led to traditional puppet theatre being considered a "theatre without an author" (Jurkowski 1995, 28). Nevertheless, in many *copioni* emerge a form of authorship which operates differently from the literary one, manifesting itself in artisanal knowledge, re-appropriation and inventiveness.

2. *Comic* maschere *and structural models*

The reflections in this article are based on rewritings from literary works: opera librettos, ancient tragedies and Shakespearean plays. Therefore, all those comedies and farces that are built around the comic protagonist are not considered, although constituting a very large part of puppet theatre's repertoire. We won't find here titles "more related to the *Commedia dell'Arte*" (Melloni 1978, 216) such as *Fagiolino barbiere dei morti*, *Il dentista ciarlatano*, *I due gemelli*, *La nascita di Fagiolino agl'alberi del sole*… This choice is determined by the fact that it is in the field of rewriting literary texts that it is most evident how a plot undergoes changes when transposed to the language of puppets. Not only the source texts were significantly cut, but the plot itself could be subordinate to the most famous adventures of the popular hero. Leydi claimed that comic masks were "added on purpose to make the action more lively and brilliant"[7] (Leydi 1958, 46). Other than that, as we shall see, the inclusion of such characters could lead to deeper consequences in the economy of the dramaturgy.

In addition to the comic *maschere* [masks] derived from the *Commedia dell'Arte* (the *zanni* Arlecchino and his nemesis Brighella, the lascivious old man Pantalone, the cunning Colombina, the doctor Balanzone…), from the end of the 18th century northern Italy populates with numerous "masks without masks", in response to the ban imposed in 1797 by the Directoire led by Napoleon Bonaparte on the celebration of the Venice carnival, and therefore on the use of masks and costumes that covered the face. New characters were thus born who, while wearing neither masks nor the classical costumes of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, were inspired by its types and characters (Melloni 2004, 31). Each aroused in a different territory, they soon gave voice to previously unexpressed local differences. Such characters were used in puppet-booths and spread to different regions,

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[7] "aggiunte a bella posta per rendere più vivace e brillante l'azione".

where they took root in the popular imagination, giving rise to different and unique expressions. Every region, if not, sometimes, every town, had its own mask to represent it: in its witty nature, in its dialectal speech, in the adventures it was involved in, in the desires or needs it had.

Some of these masks can be found in the plays analyzed here. The most recurring one is that of Fagiolino (which literally means "Little Bean", but the name perhaps comes from a *Commedia dell'Arte*'s mask), which few sources[8] tell us was introduced into glove puppet theatre by a Bologna puppeteer, Cavallazzi, at the beginning of the 19th century. Fagiolino is the typical Bolognese kid, scruffy and impertinent, a brawling but generous loafer who is always ready with his stick to do justice against the wicked. This mask achieved even greater popularity with Filippo Cuccoli (1806-1872) and his son Angelo[9] (1834-1905), legendary glove puppeteers of the Emilian city.[10] With Augusto Galli (Bologna, 1861-1949), apprentice and collaborator of Angelo Cuccoli, the character of Sganapino Posapiano was introduced in 1877, who became Fagiolino's inseparable companion.

Alongside Fagiolino it is often possible to find another typical Emilian glove puppet character, that of Sandrone. In 1775, Luigi Rimini Campogalliani, founder of a long-lived and famous family of puppeteers, was born in Carpi in the province of Modena. He is credited with introducing the character of Sandrone, a rough and ignorant peasant who speaks with a lot of linguistic blunders, being at the same time an example of folk wisdom and cunning. From the union, in 1830, of Campogalliani's daughter Ermenegilda with Giulio Preti, another Modenese puppeteer,

[8] On the character of Fagiolino and on Bolognese glove puppet theatre in general see: Cervellati 1964, 190 et seq. Melloni 1978, 212-216. Pandolfini Barberi 1923.
[9] Angelo Cuccoli made his debut in 1857 in his father's puppet-booth. Unable to rival him in the interpretation of the character of Sandrone, Angelo Cuccoli chose that of Fagiolino, making him one of the favourites of the people of Bologna. On the death of his father, Angelo Cuccoli refashioned his repertoire around the character of Fagiolino. Several Bolognese puppeteers of the next generation were trained in his castelet: Augusto Galli, who worked with Cuccoli for over ten years, but also Gaetano Chinelato, Giuseppe Mazzoni and Ciro Bertoni. In 1877, the town council moved the Cuccoli puppet-booth from the arcades of the Podestà, where it had always stood, to Piazza S. Francesco, which was more peripheral, marking his theatre's decline. In 1904, Angelo Cuccoli founded a dialect theatre company, the Compagnia Felsinea, in the Teatro Nosadella. He died shortly afterwards in Bologna on 9 February 1905.
[10] Several manuscripts of Angelo Cuccoli's *canovacci* are preserved in the Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, Cuccoli fund. The fund is described in Sorbelli 1909, 217-240.

the important and long-lived Preti dynasty was born.[11] Giulio Preti also gave Sandrone a family, called "Pavirònica" (from "pavèra", the northern regional name for marsh plants), consisting of his wife Polonia and son Sgorghiguelo (so called because he "gouges" his nose with his fingers), the latter introduced in 1846 by Guglielmo Preti, Giulio's son.

In the scripts kept at the Museo La Casa delle Marionette in Ravenna and considered autographs of Ariodante Monticelli (1822-1910), progenitor of another long-lived family of puppeteers (this time, of string puppets) from northern Italy,[12] another character is always used, that of Famiola. Invented by Giuseppe Colla[13] (1805-1861) and modelled on that of Gerolamo,[14] Famiola had the traits of the Piedmontese peasant, lazy, simple-minded, lacking the cunningness of other masks derived from the *zanni* of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, but like them always hungry: his name is said to derive from his typical expression "L'ai fam" ("I'm hungry", in Piedmontese dialect). Although Famiola did not have a long life (Leydi 1956, 270-271 and 285), there are

[11] On Modenese puppeteers, see: Bergonzini, Maletti, and Zagaglia 1980.

[12] His great-grandchildren Andrea and Mauro Monticelli are still in activity today, as glove puppeteers. They founded, together with Roberta Colombo, the Teatro del Drago company in Ravenna. As Roberta Colombo brought to light through her (yet unpublished) research into the Monticelli family tree, Ariodante Monticelli was born in Cremona in 1822, although it was long thought that he was of Piedmontese origin, as he frequently used the character of Famiola, typical of the Piedmontese province. Some of Ariodante Monticelli's manuscripts for his string-puppets' shows are in the archives of the museum La Casa delle Marionette in Ravenna.

[13] The founder of the Colla string-puppeteers family, Giuseppe, was born in Milan in 1805, but began his career as a puppeteer around 1835 on Piedmontese soil, after he was forced to leave Lombardy following the purges that took place after the Congress of Vienna for those who had had relations with the French. His company's first activities are documented in its ledgers, dating back to 1835. In 1861, the death of Giuseppe Colla led to the company being divided between his three sons (Antonio, Giovanni and Carlo). The same year saw the creation of the Compagnia Marionettistica Carlo Colla e Figli (formed by Carlo and his children Rosina, Carlo II, Giovanni and Michele), which in 1906 became a permanent company based at the Teatro Gerolamo in Milan, where it remained until 1957. After a partial hiatus, mainly due to the closure of the Teatro Gerolamo by the Milan City Council, the company resumed its activities in the 1980s. In 1984, under the direction of Eugenio Monti Colla, the Associazione Grupporiani (1984) was created, an organisation that still manages all the activities of the Compagnia Carlo Colla e Figli today. The death of the last member of the family, Eugenio Monti Colla (2017) meant the final transformation of the artistic core of the company, which for five generations had seen the transmission of the tradition from parents to children, and which today is made up only of people who have no family history linked to puppetry.

[14] On the troubled birth of the character Gerolamo and his subsequent transformation into the Turin mask of Gianduja, see Leydi 1958, 129-132 and Eusebietti 1966, 290-291.

numerous plays in which he is used as the main mask. What is interesting to note is that although the characters such as Fagiolino and Sandrone described above were typical of the glove puppet theatre (they were born within it and have remained there, without ever appearing in plays for the string puppet theatre), Famiola was born as a string puppet.

Regarding "plays specific to puppet theatre", i.e. those texts that "do not derive from any source and are written specifically to be performed in glove puppet and string puppet shows" an attempt was made to identify a "dominant" trend of narrative organization: an initial serene situation, in which a positive event is about to happen, is disrupted by a problem; then, the character who will resolve the situation appears and set in motion a series of strategies; after some suspense, the problem is solved and there is a return to the initial situation, enriched by the occurrence of the positive event announced in the first act (Melloni and Bo 1990, 17-20). It is certainly not a schematisation of universal value, but it helps to understand how these plays function differently from an actors' theatre play, from a prose text, or an opera libretto whose storytelling respects certain canons. In fact, if we compare this model of plays written for puppets in Italy during the 19th century proposed by Melloni and Bo with Greimas' actantial model (Greimas 1966), we see how the trend is quite different. In Greimas' model the subject, i.e. the hero, is on a quest to find an object. The helper supports the subject in obtaining the object. The opponent, however, works against the helper and tries to prevent the subject from gaining the object. The sender initiates the action and the receiver profits from the action and/or the object. In the plays for puppets (in the model suggested by Melloni and Bo) there is not always a sender and a receiver; often the helper can perform a large part of the action, thus taking great prominence with the subject… This pattern may be too generalist, and it goes beyond the scope of our analysis, but it helps showing the particularity of the plays directly written to be staged with puppets.

Given this difference, what about the rewritings? What happens when the masks, protagonists of these non-canonically organised stories, infiltrate the plot of a tragedy, a novel, an opera libretto? Is the actantial narrative schema altered or does it resist the heteroclite thrusts of the puppets?

3. The mask in the play

3.1 Minor changes

Let us start with the simplest case, i.e. where the comic character is placed in the foreground, in the role of companion to the protagonist, or when

its presence replaces that of one of the characters in the source text. We can find a clear example of this in the rewrites of the opera *Robert le Diable* by Giacomo Meyerbeer (1831), in particular of the libretto written by Eugène Scribe and Germain Delavigne. The libretto was praised for combining several of the key ingredients of the Romantic drama, including a supernatural plot with devilish machinations which certainly did not fail to provide good material for the puppeteers' performances. There are numerous rewritings of *Robert le Diable* in various collections and archives of puppet plays,[15] all united not only by the fact that they are inspired exclusively by Scribe's libretto, leaving aside the medieval legend or the versions disseminated by the colportage literature, but also by a substantial respect for the plot (they are usually divided into five acts, such as the opera, or shortened to four) and even for the lines.

The story is well-known: Robert, Duke of Normandy, has travelled to Palermo to attend a tournament. During a banquet, unaware that he was in the presence of Robert, the troubadour Raimbaut tells the story of the young Duke Robert the Devil, born from the union of a Norman princess with a demon. Infuriated by this accusatory tale, Robert orders Raimbaut to be hanged. The young man then forgives the troubadour when he discovers that his fiancée is Alice, his own foster-sister. She tells Robert that her mother has died and warns him that he is in danger. Robert is torn between his love for the Sicilian princess Isabella and the negative influence of Bertram, his mysterious companion who turns out to be his father as well as the devil. Despite the warnings of Alice, Robert continues to follow Bertram's debauched way of life and his evil advice. Bertram,

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[15] Not an exhaustive list: Cuccoli, Angelo. 1870. *Roberto il diavolo Con Faggiolino suo protettore, e spaventato dalle ombre sepolcrali* (play for glove puppets). Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna, fund Cuccoli, I, 6. Casalini, Anacleto. *Roberto il diavolo duca di Normandia* (play for string puppets). Archiginnasio, Bologna, fund Casalini, Box II, 21. Monticelli, Ariodante. 19th century. *Roberto il Diavolo* (play for string puppets). Museo La Casa delle Marionette, Ravenna. Bresciani, Giovanni (properties). *Roberto il diavolo ossia Un terribile patto infernale e Satana sconfitto dall'arcangelo S. Michele*. Copied in 1925. Castello dei Burattini – Museo Giordano Ferrari, Parma, fund Ferrari, 28. Concordia, Giuseppe (transcriber). 1905. Roberto il diavolo. Castello dei Burattini, Parma, fund Ferrari, 87. Rizzoli, Aldo and Giorgio (properties). *Roberto il diavolo*. Castello dei burattini, Parma, fund Cristofori, 108. Pavero, Giovanni (properties). *Roberto il diavolo* (play for string puppets). Copied by Signorelli, Antonio in 1894. Mediateca della Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi, Milano, TEA, ZC 92. Aimino, Luigi (properties). *Roberto il diavolo. Dramma fantastico in cinque atti /di Scribe e Delavigne [con Gianduja scudiero di Roberto]* (play for string puppets). Mediateca Paolo Grassi, Milano, TEA, ZC 14. Piccardo, G. B. *Roberto il diavolo duca di Normandia: spettacolo fantastico in cinque atti; con Baciccia cantastorie*. Mediateca Paolo Grassi, Milano, TEA, ZC 21.

in fact, is determined to keep his son. Following him into a cave, Alice learns that Bertram will lose Robert forever if he cannot persuade him to sign away his soul to the Devil by midnight. After realising that he has lost Isabella because of his behaviour, Robert is desperate. Bertram finally reveals his identity to his son, who resigns himself to following him into the darkness of Hell. But Alice arrives to assure Robert of Isabelle's forgiveness. She reads him his mother's last will and testament, telling him to stay away from those who betrayed her. Robert is torn between Bertram and the memory of his mother. Midnight strikes. Robert has not signed the diabolical pact proposed by his father. Defeated, Bertram disappears into hell, while at the foot of the altar Isabelle waits for Robert to join her in union. The adherence of the puppet *copioni* to this narrative matter is such that, in almost all the ones I consulted, the comic mask is entrusted with the secondary role of the troubadour Raimbaut. The scene of corruption, in which the young man is led astray by Bertram with a bag of gold and a warning not to marry Alice as his new wealth will attract plenty of women, lent itself well to being interpreted by a popular character.

There is, however, one text that is an exception, *Roberto il diavolo Con Faggiolino suo protettore, e spaventato dalle ombre sepolcrali* (PuppetPlays, n.d.) [Roberto the devil With Faggiolino his protector, and frightened by the sepulchral shadows] by the Bolognese glove puppeteer Angelo Cuccoli. After its premiere in 1870, the show was revived in 1873, 1876, 1880, 1888 and 1893, as is evident from what is noted on the manuscript. Cuccoli's rewriting has some peculiar features that differ from most of the others: the play does not open with the scene of the troubadour Raimbaut telling Robert's story, but with Fagiolino landing in Palermo together with Gioppino with the mission to rescue him from Bertram's snares. Before this scene, however, the manuscript records the antecedent of Robert's birth, probably as a reminder to the puppeteer. Interestingly, Cuccoli here takes up an aspect of the mediaeval legend of Robert le Diable, which had been swept away from Scribe's libretto and is therefore hardly to be found in other puppet plays. Whereas in the opera libretto, Robert's mother, Berta, was a virtuous woman who rejected all suitors and was then seduced by Bertram's evil spells, the rawer legend records that Berta, unable to have children, made a pact with the devil in order to give her husband an offspring: the devil sent Bertram to her, from whom Robert was born. The rest of the Cuccoli's plot remains essentially that of the opera, but the character of Alice, Roberto's foster-sister, is replaced by that of Fagiolino, "this production being translated for puppets", as the author explicitly states in a handwritten note:

Essendo questa produzione tradotta per le marionette, in luogo di Alice sorella di latte di Roberto, questa parte viene molto adatta benissimo alla Maschera del Faggiolino.

As this production is translated for puppets, in place of Robert's foster-sister Alice, this part is very well suited to the Faggiolino Mask (Cuccoli 1870).

In this "translation" (and not "adaptation"), according to Cuccoli, the comic mask could not remain on the fringes of the plot but had to play a more active role: here, then, Fagiolino is in the role of the main character's helper. This substitution clearly alters some parts of the plot: there is no trace of the troubadour Raimbaut in Cuccoli's text; it is Fagiolino himself who narrates the suspicious birth of Roberto in front of him, making him angry and then managing to calm him down (even though he's nobody's fiancé). Like many of Angelo Cuccoli's manuscripts, this one takes the form of a simple summary of the story. Except for Fagiolino, it is therefore impossible to know how the many other characters typical of puppet shows, who appear in the list of characters, were involved in the play. Only their roles are indicated: "Meneghino, head of the guards; Giuppino, Faggiolino's [sic] friend; Brighella, Roberto's servant; Tartaglia and Dottor Balanzone, court advisors". Not being able to know how these characters intervened, it is a compelling fact that even with Fagiolino playing the role of Alice, Cuccoli's manuscript does not alter any of the relationships between the actants in the play, exactly as in the other transpositions of *Robert le Diable* for the glove and string puppet theatre. Except, of course, that in Cuccoli's manuscript Fagiolino is not Roberto's foster-brother, but his "protector". He replaces, however, scene by scene, Alice's actions in the opera libretto, and its actantial function remains the same, that of the helper.

3.2 Inventive implant

The manuscript of *Macbeth ovvero l'Assassino di Duncano Re di Scozia con Famiola scudiero* (PuppetPlays, n.d.) [Macbeth or the Assassin of Duncan King of Scotland with squire Famiola] is the only one of those kept at the Museo Casa delle Marionette in Ravenna to bear the signature of the puppeteer Ariodante Monticelli, who also noted on the manuscript that he composed the play "for his string puppet theatre". Reading the play suggests that the text is based not so much on Shakespeare's tragedy, but rather on Giuseppe Verdi's opera, in particular the 1847 version of Francesco Maria Piave's libretto (Cipolla 2023). As we have seen, the opera repertoire was one of the most fortunate reservoirs from which Italian puppet theatre drew material for its rewritings; more so, if the dramatic

universe of the opera fitted into the register of the fantastic. Premonitions, apparitions of witches and ghosts, dancing demons, visions… Verdi's libretto offered enough material to be staged in the puppet theatre in an astonishing way. Monticelli pushes this aspect even further, in two different ways. On the one hand, he draws from his own repertoire successful scenes already used in other productions. His script for *Macbeth*, in fact, opens with the scene of the witches, as it is in Verdi's opera (and in Shakespeare's play), but they are first given a task by the great magician Ostragamus. The scene thus constructed is clearly reminiscent of one of the great successes of the puppet performances, staged countless times: the story of *Il Noce di Benevento*[16] [The Benevento Walnut], where it was the magician Demogorgone who imparted their task to the witches (Cipolla 2023). On the other, Monticelli carries out a real work of invention, creating new scenes from scratch that he cleverly weaves into the plot of *Macbeth*. In these scenes, obviously all created around the comic character Famiola, the fantastic and magical aspect is accentuated as much as possible. The first one takes the form of a short story: Macbeth instructs his squire Famiola to go in an enchanted forest to gather information about it and report to him. When he comes back to his master, Famiola tells of encountering three demons who attacked and beat him so badly that he flew like a balloon – "coûi sacrenon, a j'e avnuje l' caprissi d' fè una partija a'l balon e pr' balon, a sonn' servisse d'me corp!" ["those devils, they had the whim of playing a ball game, and as a ball they used my body!"]. This scene interrupts the mimetic game to give space to Famiola's diegetic narrative, establishing a comic interlude that nevertheless fits well into the plot of the tragedy. But it is in the second scene implanted in the drama that the author-puppeteer makes the most of the possibilities offered by Famiola's mask. We are in part four, the penultimate of the play. The atmosphere is gloomy: Macbeth has already carried out the regicide and had Banquo killed, whose spectre nevertheless haunts him and makes him mad. He therefore returns to the witches' lair to find out his fate, accompanied by his squire. Seeing them coming, the witches decide to mock poor Famiola.

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[16] *Il Noce di Benevento* is an old folk legend about witches' sabbaths and evil spells around an enchanted walnut tree. The legend inspired the homonymous fantasy ballet by dancer and choreographer Salvatore Viganò (1769-1821), set to music by Franz Xaver Süßmayr, which premiered at La Scala in Milan on 25 April 1812. During the 19th century, a play of *Il Noce di Benevento* was reprinted several times in popular editions, which used to publish reductions of famous stories, novels and plays. Puppeteers often used these prints as a basis from which to write their own plays.

Hungry as ever, he is lured by a cauldron on the fire into a dwelling where there seems to be no one. Once in there, he sees the strangest things: a hundred-year-old woman who first, as a joke, tries to seduce him, and then plays at making parts of her body disappear or metamorphose, by turning into a vase of flowers and into a little devil, whose body stretches and shrinks making Famiola run away in fear.

> FAMIOLA
> *Veûi n'po' guardeje* (si trasforma in un vaso di fiori) *Ooooh!… sacobigio!… cribio!… Coûsta l'é ancora pibela!… La veja l'è dventà un vas d' fior!… senti, com'a spùsso d'bon… assmijo la quint'essenssa d'tuti j trantasett' odor d'un orinarj da ospidal!… Là! coragi Famiola,… adess, i'm fass un bel boûchètt d'cousti fior, da porté a mia smorbiosa […]* (fa per prendere i fiori, e si trasforma in un piccolo Diavolo) *U…ù…un diavoû!!! scapa! …scapa !*

> FAMIOLA
> Come, look *(it turns into a flowerpot)* Ooooh! For hell's sake!… This one's incredible! The old woman has become a flowerpot! Listen, how good it smells… it seems the quintessence of all the thirty-seven smells of a hospital urinal! Let's go! Courage Famiola… now I'm going to make a nice bouquet with these flowers, to take to my fiancée […] *(he is about to take the flowers, and they turn into a little Devil)* oh…oh… a devil!!! run away! …run away!

The relatively long scene (six dense pages) exploits all the theatrical procedures and special effects typical of puppet theatre: transformism, appearances and disappearances, metamorphosis, improbable elongation of the body, lightning bolts, etc. All things that on the opera stage in a Verdi performance would probably not have been seen…

It should be noted that the character of Famiola as squire is an entirely arbitrary addition, since in Verdi's libretto the character named "domestic of Macbeth" appears only once to announce the arrival of King Duncan. The plot of the tragedy is thus interrupted twice to give space to the comic mask, who carries out a plurality of functions: it creates a direct link with the audience, it breaks the dramatic tension by lightening it with comic parts, it provides the puppeteer with material to perform technically astonishing scenes, showing his skill. However, by not taking the place of any character, the inclusion of Famiola does not alter the relationships between them. It does, however, alter, in this case much more than in the previous one, the plot: new scenes are created around it, that do not belong in the original source text. The author-puppeteer reshapes the dramatic matter and transforms it into his own language.

3.3 The changed play

The publisher Chiopris of Trieste printed several puppet plays towards the end of the 19th century.[17] One of them, anonymous, is a rewriting of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: *Amleto ovvero Arlecchino principe di Danimarca. Dramma tragico in tre atti* (PuppetPlays, n.d.) [Hamlet, i.e. Arlecchino Prince of Denmark. Tragic drama in three acts]. The title gives an important information right from the start: the protagonist of the tragedy is no longer Hamlet, possibly accompanied by a popular character, but Arlecchino himself. The same applies to the other characters in Shakespeare's text, almost all of whom are replaced by a popular mask:

Claudio, re di Danimarca	Claudius, *king of Denmark*
Arlecchino (Amleto), figlio d'altro re e nipote di Claudio	Arlecchino (*Hamlet*), *son of another king and grandson of Claudius*
Brighella (Polonio), ciambellano	Brighella (*Polonius*), *chamberlain*
Facanapa (Orazio), amico di Arlecchino	Facanapa (*Horatio*), *Arlecchino's friend*
Laerte, figlio di Brighella	Laërte, *son of Brighella*
Marcello, ufficiale	Marcellus, *officer*
Lo spettro del padre di Arlecchino	The spectre *of Arlecchino's father*
Gertrude, regina di Danimarca	Gertrude, *queen of Denmark*
Ofelia, figlia di Brighella	Ophelia, *daughter of Brighella*
Un becchino	A gravedigger

What stands out is the reasoned choice of the masks, whose relationships, codified by the *Commedia dell'Arte*, follow those between the characters in Shakespeare's text. This is particularly true of the mask of Brighella, often the antagonist of Arlecchino. Here he is given the role of Polonius, chamberlain at the Danish court, in the service first of Hamlet's father and then of his murderer Claudius, and for this reason unbearable in the eyes of Hamlet-Arlecchino, who, as we know, will kill him. Brighella's mask wears livery, a symbol of belonging, he is often at the head of the servants, insolent with his subordinates and obsequious with his masters. Brighella's choice for the role of Polonius is therefore very precise. The same goes for Facanapa in the role of Horatio, Hamlet's friend. This mask was created in 1828 by the Udine puppeteer Antonio Reccardini, and is descended from

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[17] Some titles: *Arlecchino cavaliere errante e Facanapa suo scudiero*; *Il matrimonio di Facanapa*; *Il testamento di Facanapa*; *Le disgrazie de Arlechin*; *Le stravaganze di Facanapa*.

the more famous Fracanappa mask, which is as similar in the name as it is not in the personality. Fracanappa is a 17th-century mask of Veronese origin, similar to the Venetian Pantalone, a wealthy, urban character. Reccardini's creature, on the other hand, is a peasant, constantly moving from one side of the puppet-booth to the other.

Amleto, ovvero Arlecchino principe di Danimarca follows the structure of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but simplifies and shortens it considerably. The five acts are reduced to three, and the scenes and dialogues are much more immediate, stripped of all verbal expression not essential to the action. The masks use dialect and a colloquial linguistic register, sometimes bordering on the trivial; all the other characters, on the other hand, express themselves in correct, refined Italian. From the very first scene, in which Arlecchino (Hamlet) waits with Facanapa (Horace) and the soldier Marcellus for the spectre of his father to appear, we can see an immediate difference between the character of Shakespeare's Hamlet and that of this Arlecchino. In fact, he appears as a simple, popular spirit, rather than a prince.

> FACANAPA
> *Sentì, creature! Inveze de star qua a 'spetar i spetri, no podaressimo andar anca noi a dar una bona spanzada?*

> ARLECCHINO
> *Tasi! In sto momento me trema el stomigo e no podaria magnar gnanca un chilo de maca-roni. Xe l'ombra de mio pare, ti sà, che aspetemo, l'ombra del re Amleto.*

> FACANAPA
> Hey, guys! Instead of sitting here waiting for ghosts, why don't we go and have a nice meal?

> ARLECCHINO
> Shut up! Right now my stomach's shaking and I couldn't even eat a kilo of macaroni. It's the shadow of my father we're waiting for, you know, the shadow of King Hamlet.

Despite the clearly popular character and language of the masks, the text contains several references to *Hamlet*, whose lines are often taken up in a comic or sarcastic vein, as we have just seen, or through grotesque defor-mations, or by lowering the register. In any case, the anonymous author of this play reveals a certain erudition; he knows Shakespeare's text very well and knows how to play freely with its elements. Using puppets to "mock" the serious tragedy, *Amleto, ovvero Arlecchino principe di Danimarca* appears

to be an example of parody, like many others in the puppet repertoire at the time. The shift from the tragic to the comic, from the high to the low register, is clearly visible in the rewriting of Hamlet's famous monologue. The anguishing doubt is first brought up in his famous existential formula, but it is immediately reduced to far more prosaic questions:

> ARLECCHINO
> […] *Nissun mai ga savesto scioglier el problema: Esser o no esser? Magnar o no magnar? Cantar o no cantar? Bastonar o ciapar bote? Xe meio darghele a uno e andar in galera o ciaparle e restar galantuomo?* […] *Crepar, e dopo? Ostrega! Qua sta el busilis.* […] *Mi ghe pagaria la marenda a chi me savesse dir se al mondo de là se magna e se beve.*

> ARLECCHINO
> No one has ever been able to solve the problem: to be or not to be? To eat or not to eat? To sing or not to sing? To give or to receive a blow-with-a-stick? Is it better to hit someone and go to prison or take a blow-with-a-stick and remain a gentleman? To die, and then what? Therein lies the *busillis* [thorny problem]. I'd buy a snack for anyone who could tell me whether people eat and drink in the afterlife.

These preoccupations are typical of puppets: hunger, beatings and wine. The language is reduced to a simple, elementary register, as evidenced by the use of the colloquial word "*busillis*" instead of the canonical "*question*". Here too, as in *Hamlet*, everyone dies in the end. Or almost. Arlecchino himself seems to be at the end of his tether, but in front of Facanapa, whose only thought is to go and "eat a few kilos of polenta" ["*magnar un per de chili de polenta*"], Arlecchino gets up and follows him, explaining that, having guessed the deception of Laertes' poisoned sword, he had pretended to be wounded to persuade him to exchange their swords. The last line, reserved for Arlecchino, is both hilarious and macabre, with a shameless frankness that only glove puppets can admit: "Let's go to lady polenta. Look at that lovely omelette! (*Pointing to the dead*) Too bad we can't eat it!" ["*Andemo dala siora polenta. Vara che bela fritaia! (Indicando i morti) Pecà che no la se pol magnar*"].

This rewriting of *Hamlet* for glove puppets represents the most inventive and original way in which popular characters could occupy the dramatic space of an actors' theatre play: not a timid insertion, but the real protagonists of the action. Here, the masks are not used as companions to the wooden versions of the protagonists of the source text, but they perform as the main characters. They are inserted in the play retaining their own personality and identity: Arlecchino plays the role of Hamlet, but he always

remains Arlecchino, with his fears, his jokes and his hunger. This not only alters the plot (Hamlet does not die), but also undermines the tightness of the relationships between the actants, as the object of the quest (to avenge Hamlet's father Claudius) often loses importance in comparison to other, more pressing needs. After all, what is more important for Arlecchino: to be or not to be? It all depends on whether in the afterlife one eats and drinks.

In conclusion, the exploration of artisanal inventiveness within northern Italian puppet theatre from the 19th to the 20th century reveals a rich dynamic of rewriting that transcends mere adaptation. The plays analysed enlighten the transformative power inherent in puppeteers' craft, particularly in the insertion and manipulation of comic characters within established narratives. This craft of rewriting extends beyond a simple transposition of stories, involving a nuanced process of appropriation, where stories are reimagined and reshaped in the language of puppets. From minor alterations to inventive implants and complete reinterpretations, these rewritings showcase the puppeteer's ability to reshape dramatic matter and transform it into a distinctly puppetry language. This dynamic is rooted in the insertion of regional, popular comic characters, which not only alter the plot but also inject unique variations and improvisations. Whether playing minor roles, serving as companions to protagonists, or taking center stage as absolute protagonists, these masks become catalysts for inventive reinterpretations of familiar narratives.

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