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INTRODUCTION

Puppets, small marionettes actually, accompanied Hernán Cortés and the Spanish conquistadores on their first expedition to Mexico. From that time through the recent muppet-like characters on television newscasts, puppets have participated in Mexican life. Marionettes and other puppets had a role in the evangelization and entertainment of the persons of all social and ethnic groups during the colonial era. After independence, they became a popular form of casual evening and weekend relaxation for much of the nineteenth century. The arrival of the second decade of the twentieth century brought the Revolution of 1910 as well as increased urbanization and an expanding mass media. All three developments affected changes that shaped puppet theater, until the advent of television in the 1950s almost ended the entertainment.

The four essays in this special issue of *The Americas* address puppetry and puppet performance from the late colonial period until the mid-twentieth century. The authors examine in particular marionettes and entertainment, and hand puppets and education. The essays need to be placed in the context of the Spanish entertainment traditions in the peninsula and in the colony. Puppetry, like many other popular pleasures and cultural practices that appeared in Spain, were probably brought by entertainers as they arrived from Naples, a part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies ruled from Aragón, or perhaps they traveled first to France and then to Spain. Italian-styled puppets reached the Iberian Peninsula certainly during the twelfth century. The marionettes soon became increasingly popular, especially during the celebration of Lent. Roman Catholic Church fathers ruled that theaters and other entertainments must be closed, but that puppet performances of the passion of Christ or other biblical stories could continue during the solemn 40-day period. The marionette performances featured religious homilies, Mediterranean folklore, and *Comedia'della'arte* imbroglios.[1] By the mid-eighteenth century, the puppeteers had established their own *cofradía* and the puppets had achieved a major place in popular entertainments in Madrid, with marionettes, glove or hand puppets, shadow puppets (*las sobras chinescas*) and

1. Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry: A World History* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 2005), p. 14.

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automatas, or life-sized and larger characters used for parades and fiestas. Public exhibitions, such as nativity scenes, at times included stringed or shadow puppets.[2]

One popular puppet, Don Folías, demonstrates this pattern of cultural migration. The puppet's origins reach back to Naples, where he was known as Polichinela, named after his sixteenth-century creator Paolo Cinelli. At times, he was also called Pulcinello. The puppet had a hawk nose and pointed chin, with a high, loud nasal voice. Most important, he often appeared humpbacked (alluding to the folklore of these individuals) and braced with a walking stick, one that he used to hit other puppets. Once introduced in Spain, Polichinela became Don Cristóbal Polichinela. When he moved to colonial Mexico, he changed his simple white clothing to an aristocratic suit and top hat, but retained the "elástico pescuezo, rubicundas mejillas y gigantesca nariz" (the elastic neck, rosy-red cheeks, and gigantic nose); both his nose and neck grew longer when he became angry.[3] Other puppets along with Don Folías made the same journey from Naples to Spain to Mexico.

In New Spain, the ratio of the small number of missionaries to the large number of indigenous peoples prompted the friars to enlist puppets in the evangelization campaign. Marionettes performed in stories of miracles and the Bible, depictions of spiritual life, and such popular religious practices as Pastorelas, and they re-created victories over the Moors, such as the "Battle of Jerusalem," first performed in Tlaxcala in 1538.[4] At the same time, there gradually developed significant secular entertainments that featured puppets. Paul McPharlan asserted in his history of puppetry in the Americas that the marionettes in the Spanish colonies soon developed a wide following throughout both New Spain and Peru.[5] Puppeteers performed in the capital city, Guadalajara, Puebla, and a number of other colonial towns, especially the Port of Veracruz. The Bourbon secular entertainments of the eighteenth century included stringed characters that became widely known in the colony. Among them, there was Don Folias, of course, who constantly got caught up in humorous episodes with his friend and nemesis, El Negrito. Their performances involved cuckoldry, jealousy, and rivalry. Other sketches featured common features of everyday romance and marriage, such as the play entitled

2. J. E. Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España (desde sus origines hasta mediados del siglo XVIII)* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), pp. 8-9, 99, 107; *Títeres, marionetas y otras diversiones populares de 1758 a 1859* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Madrileños, 1959), p. 8, *passim*.

3. Gilberto Ramírez Alvarado, "Los títeres en México durante la colonia, del siglo XVI al XIX," *La hoja del titiritero Independiente* (1990), p. 13; the quoted description comes from Yolanda Jurado Rojas's essay, "Puppet Theater in Eighteenth-Century Mexico"; http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polichinela

4. Michael J. Doudoroff, ed., *Moros y Cristianos en Zacatecas: Text of a Mexican Folk Play* (Lawrence, KS: Amadeo Conca Press, 1981).

5. Paul McPharlan, *The Puppet Theatre in the Americas: A History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 6, 7, 70.

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Rapto o Robo, discussed in delightful detail in the essay by Yolanda Jurado Rojas. The strong connections between both religious and secular puppetry extended to the production of the puppets themselves. Some puppeteers made their own marionettes, but in other cases the miniature figures were the work of *santeros*, who also produced images of saints for parish churches.

The puppets continued their roles in dramatic productions during Lent in the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Church leaders expected the plays to focus on the religious experience, just as they expected the faithful to practice religious exercises and to devote their leisure to prayer, reflection, and pious reading. For years, puppeteers followed these directives, but as the mid-nineteenth century approached, the puppets in the capital became increasing irreverent. In their performances in the Relox Theater, instead of Jesus and other biblical personalities, the well known secular characters El Negrito, Juan Panadero and Don Ferruco were featured.[6] The victory of the Liberals in the War of Reform (1858-1861) and against the French (1862-1867) resulted in a more secular society, with greater opportunities for non-religious entertainment. Puppeteers expanded their companies, performances, and themes, which now included the delightful "How El Negro defeated the French."[7]

After the defeat of the French and the execution of Maximiliano (1867), the liberal society experienced an expansion of popular diversions that featured opera troupes, dramatic and sketch theater, circuses, itinerant acrobats, wandering musicians and magicians, and carnival exhibits of wonders of all kinds. Puppeteers grew in number, gave performances in the major towns, and traveled the roads in groups or as solitary individuals, with only Don Folías, El Negrito, or some other puppet for company.[8]

The repertoire for puppets expanded during the nineteenth century. Since its inception, puppetry experienced a cross-fertilizing relationship with other forms of culture and entertainment. The circular exchange of characters, themes, and narratives connected to spiritual and fictional literature, along with the Bible, and reached back at least to the classic novel *Don Quijote*, in which Cervantes included a segment with a puppeteer and his characters. As the friars recognized, puppets could be used to make an illiterate and pagan community familiar with the narratives and characters

6. Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Juárez (1868-1872)* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1961), pp. 19-20.

7. William H. Beezley, "Cómo fue que El Negrito salvó a México de los franceses: las fuentes populares de la identidad nacional," *Historia Mexicana,* no. 226 (Octubre-Diciembre, 2007), pp. 405-444.

8. The diversity of popular entertainments across the nation can be appreciated by consulting the municipal licensing records, usually identified as "diversiones públicas," in local archives. For various solitary and group puppeteers, see Sonia Iglesias Cabrera and Guillermo Murray Prisant, *Piel de papel, manos de palo: Historia de los títeres en México* (México: Espasa-calpe Mexicana, 1995).

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of Christianity and the religious culture. Without ever reading Cervantes's story, Mexicans recognized the images and the characters of Don Quijote, Sancho Panza, and Dulcinea. These characters appeared in masquerades, fiestas, plays, and puppet shows. Ricardo Pérez Montfort has provided some outstanding examples of the transmission of the general cultural practices, traditions, and images through oral and visual processes. The novel of Cervantes was rivaled in the nineteenth century by those of Federico Gamboa, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, and Jules Verne, and condensed versions of their stories appeared on the puppet stage. Opera, music halls, bull fights, circuses, regional folklore, disasters (ship wrecks, for example), historical events, and uncommon natural occurrences (eclipses of the sun, and the appearance of Halley's comet) all provided material for puppets of all kinds. In this way, the puppeteers both drew on and contributed to the rich, largely oral and performative culture and in representing the diversity of regional mores and folk types, they added to the community of shared national identity.[9]

As important as this oral and visual culture was, it was equaled and, no doubt, intertwined with the aural one created by the music and sounds of the period, that was repeated or instigated by puppet performances. El Negrito's dance was widely known, with sounds and rhythms that audiences made by clapping, stomping, or pounding to call him on stage or to demand the little drama's denouncement. Puppet musicians performed regional *jarabes* and *sones*, with live musicians behind the stage. Later in the nineteenth century, the puppets formed *orchestras típicas*, and symphonic groups that played the popular music of the day, operas such as *Aida*, and concert music. These musical performances, because of the delightful irony, likely included the French composer Charles Gounod's mid-nineteenth century *Funeral March for a Marionette*.[10] Common sounds also formed an essential part of puppet plays, creating what has been labeled as the soundscape of a parish, community, or region, with church bells, domestic noises, and street sounds.[11]

The range of entertainment interchange increased with the rise of new technology and media forms in the first half of the twentieth century. Characters, motifs, and narratives hopped and skipped from dramatic theater, sketch performances, circuses, and street performances to board games, comic books, radio, movies, and television and back again. Some of the most fulsome use of puppets outside its venue occurred in these related media, and include Roberto Gavaldón's movie *Macario* (1959), but most dramatically in director Dana Rotberg's *Angel de Fuego*

9. William H. Beezley, *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), pp. 98-145.

10. This composition was widely-known in the United States from 1955 to 1962 as the theme to the television program "Alfred Hitchcock Presents." My thanks to Jennifer Jenkins, from the Department of English at the University of Arizona for this information.

11. R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), pp. 3-123.

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(1992) that brings puppets back to their role in evangelization. Eli Guerra's gravel voiced song "Angel de Fuego,"[12] no doubt, recalls for listeners who saw the movie both the puppeteers and the puppets relationship to the protagonist. Both the Azcárraga-owned radio XEW and later Televisa presented the program "Títiremundo," with celebrity singers, actors, and dancers as guests of the marionettes. Mamerto probably offers the supreme example, as he represented a country migrant to the city, and the character appeared on the radio, in comic strips and in fictional narratives, as a papier-mâché figure for Corpus Christi, and as a popular puppet of the 1920s and the 1930s. Among puppets alone, Vale Coyote made the journey from the country to city, with all the changes in life and work that it entailed.

During these same decades, the pedagogical use of gloved puppets demonstrated two common characteristics of the revolution's social programs. First, it adds to the general interpretation of the Ministry of Education's practice of drawing on the evangelization campaigns of the Church in its programs, with rural educational missions and the use of puppets to teach a variety of hygienic and moral lessons. Second, the various campaigns using puppets drew on foreign examples, such as Soviet puppets, especially as it moved from urban schools to the countryside. In this way, the Secretaría de Educación Pública's (SEP) puppets demonstrated the pragmatic policies and openness to foreign ideas of revolutionary bureaucrats. The revolution's cadre of agents who interacted directly with the people included the party boss, agrarian reformer, union organizer, health inspector, measles vaccinator, school teacher, and hand puppet.

A comparison of the puppeteers identified in the following essays identifies two groups: One was the petite bourgeoisie, who as independent entrepreneurs performed with the puppet actors on street corners, on temporary stages, or in theaters across the nation and thus demonstrated this group's grasp of national culture, traditions, folklore and politics. The other was the intellectuals who joined the SEP to create pedagogical plays, who had formal training, often including artistic education, and who held ideological commitments that shaped some of their performances. This distinction between the puppeteers and their creations, both plays and puppets, although not explored here, offers an intriguing topic for research into public entertainment in general.

As preliminary and limited as is the information on puppetry, entertainment, and pedagogy in Mexico, the historiography remains almost blank for the rest of Latin America. McPharlan asserted years ago that Viceregal Lima had rich and diverse entertainments, but no historian has investigated his statement. More-

12. The song was released on her obscure album, *Pa' Morirse de Amor* (EMI, 1997). Sandra Muñoz provided this information.

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over, only rare and scattered references exist for puppetry as entertainment or pedagogy for Latin American nations outside of Mexico for the two centuries after independence. There exists next to nothing, beyond some extremely limited comments on educational puppet groups in Cuba during the 1930s. These troupes had some interaction with Mexican puppeteers from the Ministry of Education. Later in the century, tantalizing anecdotes appear for Argentina. The graphic designer Mane Bernardo founded the Teatro Nacional de Títeres del Instituto Nacional de Estudios de Teatro de la Comisión Nacional de Cultura in 1944 that survived until 1946. The following year, he formed another puppet group Los Títeres de Mane Bernardo y Sarhan Bianchi, that performed throughout Buenos Aires in parks, schools, hospitals, orphanages, jails, and cultural centers. This puppet company traveled to towns across the nation and made numerous international appearances, including puppet festivals in both the United States and Mexico. It continued for forty years, performing for both children and adults and utilizing national folklore and the fiction of Luis Borges for their dramas.[13] The Bernardo and Bianchi puppets served as the basis for the Museo Argentino del Títere in San Telmo. Beyond the information for this group, little is know about puppets in Argentina.

Fascinating traces of puppets exist for Colombia. In 2008, puppeteers there published a directory of the 86 puppet groups that formed the Association of Puppeteers and that had created a digital magazine, *Desde el Atico,* and website, with a video from the play, *Bolivar Titere de Libertad.* This suggests both widespread and longstanding familiarity and popularity of puppets. In the city of Medellín, newspaper advertisements announced puppet shows for the 1980s. In 1975, Liliana Maria Palacio founded "Manicomio de Muñecos" and her marionettes have performed since then for both children and adults in her home venue and in schools and theaters. The puppets have a repertoire of well-known children's stories ("Red Riding Hood" and "The Three Pigs") and inventive tales based on local folklore of Marimonda, referring to Mother Nature and Mistress of the Animals, who lives deep in the forest. She protects nature, including its animals, and is unforgiving when humans enter the forest to alter or destroy it. The Marimonda also appears as one of the principal characters in the carnival of Barranquilla. Another puppet drawn from Spanish American oral traditions is El Hojarasquín (also known by other names such as El Caiporá or Padre Monte), a leafy tree stump with backward feet, who scares away woodchoppers. The puppets appear in plays that tell intriguing stories of the environment, especially about water and the forest. Palacio's group has appeared over the years in national and international, especially Spanish, festivals. In addition, Medellín has another puppet group, Títeres-Porno, that claims to combine sexual situations

13. Kristin Ruggiero from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee provided this information.

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and humor for audiences, and actually provides sex education plays for teenagers. These activities over the last quarter century, hint at a tradition of puppets in the community.[14]

In Chile, during the years of the government of Salvador Allende, working through the Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (Agricultural Development Institute or INDAP), Hugo Cerda formed a puppet troupe as part of the newly-formed Theater and Folklore Department. Cerda's puppets entertained, educated, and attempted to break down class differences. He also assisted in the training of *campesinos* to perform their own puppet shows on local community concerns. These included anti-alcoholism dramas and plays to encourage expanded opportunities for women in national life. The workshops expanded and were soon offered by the National Marionette Theater, the State Technical University, and the Agricultural Development Institute. These puppet programs, of course, fell victim to the 1973 military coup.[15] Other Latin American nations, such as Honduras, which has hosted a puppet festival (Festititere) since 2000, also maintain puppet programs, but to date little information exists about marionettes in the region.

As for the essays in this issue of *The Americas,* each forms part of larger studies of Mexico by the authors. Yolanda Jurado Rojas, who recently completed her Ph.D. at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, investigates both literature and theater in the region stretching from Mexico City to Veracruz during the Bourbon years, and she places puppets within in this genre of fiction and performance. Francisca Miranda Silva received the Rosete Aranda medal in July 2008 for her contributions to puppetry from the Museo Nacional de Títire in recognition of her larger project making available the archives and images of puppets at the Centro Nacional de los Artes, with CD publications of the holdings. William H. Beezley has recently published *Mexican National Identity* that incorporates nineteenth-century puppets, and has a research project that involves popular music, public diversions, and revolutionary programs in the 1920s and 1930s. Puppetry provides only one aspect of programs for children and the children's responses in Elena Abarrán's investigation of childhood in Mexican revolutionary society. Stephen Lewis, through the vehicle of puppetry, continues his studies of government programs and indigenous communities in Chiapas. As diverse as

14. See the Manicomio de muñecos offiicial Website, http://www.manicomiodemunecos.com/ and http://www.matacandelas.com/temporada.htm for the porno puppet group. My thanks to Paula Barreiro at La Universidad de Medellín for suggestions about these contemporary groups. Advertisements appear regularly in *El Colombiano,* the local newspaper. See Oct. 21, 1985 as an example.

15. See the chapter "Puppet Policy: Marionettes and *Muñecos* as Teaching Tools in Chile, 1970-1973" in the forthcoming dissertation, Erika M. Korowin, "Crafting a New Nation: Cultural Politics on the Chilean Road to Socialism, 1970-1973" (University of Arizona).

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these larger research projects are, the authors all identified puppets as part of the educational and enjoyable experiences of Mexicans and they provide information on the characters who become widely known as human heroes and celebrities across Mexican society.

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