



The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947): The Paladins of France in America. By Jo Ann Cavallo. London, New York: Anthem Press, 2023. xxiv, 303 pp., 30 b/w illustrations. Hardcover \$110.00, softcover, eBook \$27.99.

Jo Ann Cavallo, Professor of Italian at Columbia University, has published widely on Italian chivalric epic and its performance traditions in the Mediterranean. Her most recent publication, *The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947)*, is based on Sicily's *opera dei pupi* marionette tradition, which was classified by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2001. While critical literature has tended to focus on how the tradition has developed within its own geographical borders, this book, for the first time, brings to life how the Sicilian puppet tradition migrated to the United States owing to the success of the puppet family led by Agrippino Manteo. In doing so, it offers a fascinating insight into a different kind of Italian diaspora that travelled to America in the early twentieth century—a puppet diaspora.

The book is divided into several parts. The foreword by Alessandro Napoli, a leading member of the Fratelli Napoli *opera dei pupi* company in Catania and the Antonio Pasqualino International Puppet Museum in Palermo, begins by praising the originality and scope of the book. Part One is then devoted to the history of the Agrippino Manteo puppet family, starting with Agrippino's birth, his commercial success following his move from Catania to New York, and the subsequent years his family strove to keep his legacy alive.

Part Two makes visible the 270 scripts contained in the family's notebooks, some of which remain incomplete. The eight chapters in this second part bring to life Cavallo's own English translations of eight selected plays from Manteo's collection, which are exemplary of the cycle in *La Storia dei Paladini di Francia* and representative of the kind of plays which are still performed in Sicily today. Cavallo provides, in her own words, "a literal rendering whenever feasible, with occasional recourse to idiomatic expressions in



English that captures nuances of meaning that would have been lost in a word-for-word translation” (p. 71). Each translation is preceded by a comprehensive introduction to the play followed by a comparative analysis which begins with a background on the writers who provided the basis for the plays, namely the Renaissance poets Matteo Maria Boiardo, Ludovico Ariosto, and Giusto Lo Dico. The chapters then include the subsequent adaptations of these works by Agrippino Manteo to show how the different literary sources were carefully modified for the puppet performances. What is striking about this section is how it sheds light on Agrippino, not just as a puppeteer, but as a professional playwright: he continuously wrote—and rewrote—the scripts in his family’s repertoire. In her examination of the scripts, Cavallo offers meticulous detail about the contents of the notebooks, including a close inspection of the comments in the margins, the different production dates, and the changes later incorporated into the plays by Agrippino’s son, Mike.

The book closes with a series of appendices which list all the different marionettes, the publications in Agrippino Manteo’s library, his repertoire of plays with the translated synopses, and character descriptions for the cycle of works, before finally concluding with a Manteo family genealogy.

In addition, the book refers to the online resource, eBOIARDO, which was initially created by the author in 2001: <https://edblogs.columbia.edu/eboiardo/>. This well laid-out digital platform helps to illustrate all the different plays, puppets, and scripts involved in the *opera dei pupi* tradition, and includes interviews with the many different surviving puppeteers. In so doing, the book is able to visually represent the cultural heritage and offer an updated record that tracks how it continues to develop today. It is a valuable resource for students and those interested in Sicily and puppet performance traditions more broadly.

Given that the book is hard to fault, my only comment would be that I was left wanting *more*: How did Manteo’s family interact with other prominent nineteenth-century puppeteers in Catania, such as the great Don Giovanni Grasso? How exactly did Cavallo



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produce her translations—what was altered or omitted from the original Italian scripts?

Overall, Cavallo provides a captivating portrait of a puppet theatre family whose contribution to the circulation of Sicilian popular theatre is nothing less than remarkable. This is a must-read for all those interested in the translation and circulation of minoritized performance traditions.

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