Four Lives:
The Impact and Significance of Puppet Theatre in Ireland.

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Date

Acknowledgements

While my name appears on the title page of this dissertation, I am painfully aware that it is the product of so much assistance, advice, and facilitation from many people over many years.

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Abstract

PhD Title: Four Lives: The Emergence and Development of Puppetry in Ireland.

Author: Martin G. Molony, BA, MA.

This study explores the significant yet under-researched history of puppetry in Ireland. Through detailed case studies of four influential puppet theatre impresarios - Randal Stretch, Lambert D'Arc, Nelson Paine, and Eugene Lambert - the study uncovers the impact of puppetry on Irish cultural and social life over three centuries. It demonstrates how these practitioners innovated within their art form, influenced mainstream theatre, and contributed to the international development of puppetry.

Despite particular interest in the puppet theatre from many Irish literary figures, including Jonathan Swift, George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, the influence of this art form in Ireland has been understated. This dissertation highlights the absence of significant academic or historical consideration of this particular performance art in Ireland – even to the extent that it is mistakenly accepted that Ireland does not have a significant history of puppet performance.

As a professional puppeteer of 40 years, the author brings a unique perspective to considerations of production and practice, providing a practitioner's insight to the impact and significance of puppet performance within Irish cultural history. The dissertation includes a contextual chapter on puppetry performance, based on the author's professional experience and informed by academic and professional sources.

The primary research for this work comprises detailed research across an extensive range of archival sources. The work uncovers previously unavailable and unreferenced archival sources that provide a fresh perspective on the puppet theatre in Ireland across three centuries.

The core of this dissertation is a set of four journal articles on each of the chosen case studies, which have been published in international peer-reviewed academic journals over a period of three years. The completed thesis seeks to build on the validation provided by the peer review and publication of these articles.

Specifically, this work successfully challenges the misconception that Ireland lacks a significant puppetry history, showing instead that Irish puppetry has been a vital and influential art form. The dissertation highlights the adaptability of puppet performance to changing environments and its role in satirical, experimental, and children's performance. This work underscores the need for a comprehensive history of Irish puppetry, illustrating its importance and impact both domestically and internationally.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

1.1 Purpose, Scope and Objectives

The specific purpose of this work is to challenge '…the mistaken assumption that there was no history of puppetry in Ireland before the second half of the twentieth century.'[1] This study uncovers the impact and significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland as an art form or performance type. This work also demonstrates that the practice of puppetry in Ireland has influenced the development and practice of the puppet theatre internationally.

Specifically, this research sought to answer the question: Has the puppet theatre been a significant form of professional entertainment, performance or theatrical production in Ireland?

…and to expand on this question by addressing these sub-questions:

- What impact have individual practitioners had on the puppet theatre as an art form or performance genre in Ireland?
- What impact has Irish puppetry had on puppet performance internationally?
- How has puppet theatre in Ireland adapted to technological opportunities and challenges?

The puppet theatre in Ireland has not received the same research and publication as this type of performance has in other countries. Ireland is one of the few countries for which there is no comprehensive published national history on the puppet theatre. John McCormick, who has written extensively on European puppet theatre and on that of specific European countries, observed that the absence of a written history has led people to assume an absence of historical puppet theatre in Ireland.[2] George Speaight, in his comprehensive history of the English puppet theatre includes a section on puppetry in Ireland, but laments that: 'the history of the Irish puppet theatre calls for more detailed treatment than is possible here. Perhaps one day an Irishman will bring the whole rich and absorbing story to light.'[3] This dissertation seeks to rectify that deficit in highlighting the significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland, both as an Irish form of theatre, but also as a significant influence on the puppet theatre globally.

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[1] John McCormick, 'Lambert Theatre and Puppetry Redefined' in Eamonn Jordan and Eric Weitz (eds), *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary Irish theatre and performance* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2018), p. 287.

[2] McCormick, 'Lambert Theatre and Puppetry Redefined'.

[3] George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (London, 1955), p. 127.

This work does not purport to be a history of the puppet theatre in Ireland, but it is the basis on which such a history might be written. Aspects of the practice of puppetry in Ireland are not covered by this work, including the significant history of ventriloquism associated with Irish practitioners. Neither does this dissertation address the impact of the many touring puppet companies that visited Ireland during the period under consideration. Instead, the study focuses on four case studies to illustrate the impact and significance of the puppet theatre as a form of expression, entertainment, and performance over three centuries.

Each of the chosen cases highlights a significant aspect of the way the puppet theatre operated in Ireland and made a particular contribution to the practice of puppet theatre in the wider world. Between them, they cover periods between 1710 and 2010 and cumulatively, they reveal ways in which the puppet theatre impacted on, or interacted with, other realms, such as mainstream theatre and television.

1.2 Author's Perspective as Practitioner

Practitioner-based enquiry allows practitioners to systematically enquire into their own practice or domain of activity with the benefit of their own experience. This enquiry involves 'the deliberate and arranged focusing of a research technique' on a research question, aided by the practitioner's critical reflection on their own practice.[4] Reflection in this instance is understood as enhanced cognitive ability based on self-criticism and self-reflection drawn from an immersion in the practice under examination.

While the research question in practitioner-based enquiry will differ from project to project, certain elements or characteristics of the practitioner-based enquiry process remain central to each project. Firstly, the practitioner-researcher will have accumulated significant professional experience in the practice under consideration. Secondly, the practitioner-researcher is intellectually curious about an aspect of the practice in which they operate. This may 'induce the motivation to seek to acquire, as far as is reasonable, new patterns of knowledge' that is used to answer a specific research question.[5] Thirdly, the practitioner-researcher is sensitive to and knowledgeable about the practice in which they operate, particularly its contemporary configuration. Fourthly, the practitioner-researcher is involved in networks of fellow-practitioners that operate within the domain under consideration.

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[4] Louis Murray, *Practitioner-based enquiry: principles for postgraduate research / Louis Murray and Brenda Lawrence.* (Washington, D.C., 2000), p. 10.

[5] Ibid., p. 12.

However, these elements or characteristics of practitioner-based research do not displace the need for rigorous research methodologies. Rather they instil a heightened awareness of the practices or domain under consideration due to the practitioner-researcher's personal involvement in that practice or domain.

The converse of this is the need to be aware of 'the deceptive perception that "prior experience" is an index by which topics can be listed and interrogated'.[6] Specifically, the practitioner-researcher must be aware of their own self-beliefs and attitudes in relation to the practice under consideration and must not allow these to 'colour the view of the enquiry being undertaken or the outcomes envisaged'.[7] In qualitative research (such as the present thesis) such dangers are reduced by 'adherence to ethical procedures, by declaration of known interests and preferments, and by careful accounting for the subjective feature of the enquiry'.[8]

The author has been a puppeteer for forty years and director of a travelling marionette theatre, the Moon & Sixpence Puppet Theatre for twenty years. In the course of this work, he has developed, produced and performed marionette productions for a variety of audiences at primary schools, libraries, arts centres and festivals throughout Ireland.

This professional activity has been supplemented by professional networking through membership of Puppetry Ireland, the British Puppet & Model Theatre Guild and Union Internationale de la Marionette (UNIMA). Working alongside other puppeteers, the author was Chairperson of Ireland's International Puppet Festival from 2008 to 2012, which hosted puppet companies from Ireland, the UK, across Europe, the United States and South America.

The author's professional experience as a puppeteer and his immersion within the practice of puppet performance has brought an enhanced cognitive ability to the historical practice of puppetry performance, as discussed previously as a strength of practitioner-based enquiry. In this instance, a practitioner's perspective brings an understanding of puppetry techniques that allows for a nuanced analysis of historical performances. For example, the author has a particular understanding of the challenges and limitations of manipulation styles and of the intricacies involved in creating particular movements.

As this work demonstrates, the relationship between puppeteer and puppet is an integral part of what distinguishes puppetry from other forms of artistic expression and performance. Being

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[6] Ibid., p. 43.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

aware of this relationship from first-hand experience has given the author an informed perspective on historical puppet performances and can deepen analyses of audience reception and emotional engagement within historical contexts.

As a puppeteer, the author has successfully adopted the use of creative storytelling as part of the art form. Puppeteers often draw from cultural narratives and folklore, allowing them to contextualize puppet theatre within broader societal movements and historical events. This perspective can illuminate how puppetry reflects cultural values and shifts over time.

In the course of his puppetry career, the author was struck by one incident that illustrated the timeless nature of puppet performance. A power failure during an outdoor performance at a country fair disabled the lighting and amplification. The performance continued using the marionette stage as a sound box to amplify the voices of the performers and daylight to light the marionettes. Without electricity, the performance was the same as it would have been at the same country fair 300 years earlier. The audience experience remained as it would have been for that eighteenth century audience, despite all the technological advancements of the intervening years. While this incident illustrates the continuity and resilience of the puppet theatre, it contrasts with the diverse nature of puppetry in appealing to very different audiences over that time.

1.3 Research Approach and Structure

As this work is not a historical chronology of the development of puppetry in Ireland, the selection of the case studies was an important consideration. Each was chosen based on the extent of their professional output, illustrated by the number of performances and significance within performance and entertainment of the period. Each of the chosen showmen stands out as having significantly impacted the practice of puppet theatre in Ireland, having brought puppetry to bear on other forms of performance or expression in Ireland, and had an influence on puppetry internationally.

Each of the chosen practitioners is male. This is a consequence of choosing the leaders of the four most prolific puppet companies in Ireland across three centuries. For some of the four case studies, their wives were heavily involved in their work but remained in a secondary position professionally. This is highlighted by Jacky Bratton when she describes 'women who were the driving forces that brought a stage partnership or family to success and eminence, either by their sense of business or simply their innate abilities'.[9] Each of the wives of the chosen subjects undoubtedly enabled them to achieve the success they had, but their direct

[9] Jacqueline S. Bratton, *New readings in theatre history* (Cambridge, UK, 2003), p. 190.

professional involvement varies across the four case studies. Little is known of Randal Stretch's wife, Alice Marshall, but she appears not to have been involved in the business in any way. Lambert D'Arc's wife, Anne North, ran the Cardiff waxworks while her husband toured with waxworks and marionettes, taking over the business on his death as *Madame D'Arc's*. Nelson Paine's wife, Prudence Gleeson, performed alongside him in the *Nairobi Puppet Theatre* and as part of the *Puppet Opera Company* on his return to Dublin. Eugene Lambert's wife, Mai Bolton, created many of the puppet costumes for the *Lambert Puppet Theatre* and manipulated puppets alongside Eugene in the early days of his television career.

The selection of four men as subjects for this work does not suggest that there were not women of equal success or importance within the entertainment, performance, or theatrical management in Ireland. Randal Stretch's competition for audiences in eighteenth-century Dublin was mirrored by an Italian dance troupe led by Signora Violante, but this was not puppetry.[10] An English puppeteer of the same period, Charlotte Charke, is acknowledged as 'one of the first English women ever to manage a theatre company (and later a puppetry company)…', but that was not in Ireland.[11]

The gender imbalance of this work is unfortunate, but the issue has been recognised previously: 'While the histories of puppetry are commonly dated to ancient pasts, the inclusion of women as practitioners, theoreticians, and advocates who further the profession and scholarship, as well as critical analyses of female figures, are not surprisingly scarce.' As part of the explanation for this, Mello quotes historian Didier Plassard's entry *for Le Dictionnaire Universel des Créatrices* that 'traditional puppet theatres, long in the hands of men, have been subject to the same rules as actor's theatre, and therefore, in certain cultures or at certain times, women have been prohibited from going on the stage'.[12]

Each of the chosen four cases highlights a significant aspect of the way the puppet theatre operated in Ireland and made a particular contribution to the practice of puppet theatre in the wider world. The impact of Randal Stretch's Capel Street puppet theatre illustrates the extent to which puppet theatre can become the centre of the satirical and political commentary of the day. The case of Lambert D'Arc provides a unique insight into the way puppet theatre

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[10] Grainne McArdle, 'Signora Violante and Her Troupe of Dancers 1729-32' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, xx (2005), pp 55–78.

[11] Amber Posner, 'Making a Troublemaker: Charlotte Charke's Proto-Feminist Punch' in Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (New York, 2014).

[12] Alissa Mello, Claudia Orenstein and Cariad Astles, *Women and Puppetry: Critical and Historical Investigations* (New York, 2019), p. 5.

showmen and impresarios were a significant part of the theatrical and entertainment world from a business perspective. Nelson Paine's work with the Dublin Marionette Group and the Puppet Opera Company highlights the extent to which puppet theatre could be regarded as mainstream theatre, rather than as a form of popular entertainment and how experimental theatre practice could be realised through the puppet theatre. The case of Eugene Lambert's involvement with the Irish television service illustrates the ability of puppet theatre to adapt to new forms of performance and communication and the extent to which significant innovation in early children's television happened in Ireland well before it had done so internationally.

Indeed, the first part of the twentieth-first century has been regarded by some as a puppetry renaissance as a form of expression or performance. Episale points to the increasing use of puppetry on stage and in film and the growth of international festivals of puppetry.[13] Orenstein suggests that the impact of this revival can also be seen in the use of CGI and motion capture in movies such as *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) and *Avatar* (2009), 'that draw on the skills and techniques of puppeteers'.[14] This dissertation is a contribution to articulating the rich history that puppetry has had in Ireland and how it has influenced the medium that continues to be an important aspect of human expression.

This study is structured around the presentation of the four case studies, each of which has been published in peer-reviewed journals and included here within chapters 2-5:

- 'Oh, This Is More of Stretch's Show': Randal Stretch and Puppet Theatre in Eighteenth-Century Ireland was published in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, Issue 37 (2022).
- Showmanship and Entrepreneurialism in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: The Case of Lambert D'Arc was published in *New Hibernia Review*, Issue Winter 2023.
- Nelson Paine, Experimental Theatre, and Puppetry in Ireland, 1942-1952 was published in *Estudios Irlandeses*, Issue 18, 2023.
- 'A flash gun for making puffs of smoke': Eugene Lambert, puppetry and Ireland's new television service has been accepted for publication in *Eire-Ireland*, Volume 59, Number 3 & 4, Fall/Winter 2024.

Randal Stretch (unknown-1746) was born in either England or Wales and operated a puppet theatre in Dublin in the first half of the eighteenth century that attracted the attention of

[13] Frank Episale, 'The Emerging Puppetry Renaissance' in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, xxix, no. 2 (2007), pp 59–65.

[14] Claudia Orenstein, 'Our Puppets, Our Selves: Puppetry's Changing Paradigms' in *Mime Journal*, xxvi, no. 1 (2017), p. 91.

Jonathan Swift and his circle. References by Swift and other writers of the period acknowledged the strength of satirical impact of the puppet theatre. In addition to catching the public imagination, Stretch's theatre became so successful that it challenged mainstream theatre for audiences.

Lambert D'Arc (1824 – 1893) was born in France where he trained as a sculptor and later moved to England where he worked as a waxwork modeller, eventually creating his own touring waxworks exhibition. D'Arc brought his waxworks to Dublin in 1868 where he expected to work for some months but remained to set up home for several years. Shortly after arriving in Dublin, he transformed some of his waxwork figures into marionettes and developed a marionette company that later toured Britain, South Africa, Australia, and India and is regarded as 'the most influential of Victorian Marionette Companies'[15] in the world.

Nelson Paine (1927 – 2000) was born in Scotland and moved to Dublin as a child, where he remained until adulthood. Paine developed two experimental puppet theatre companies in Dublin in the 1940s and 1950s, when he demonstrated that puppetry should be regarded as a significant art form, rather than just a form of popular entertainment or as a means of imitating human theatrical performance. Paine went on to build on these experiences in Ireland and later established the Nairobi Puppet Theatre.

Eugene Lambert (1928 – 2010) was born in Sligo and moved to Dublin as a young adult to develop his part-time career as a ventriloquist and puppeteer in the 1950s. Lambert transition his cabaret and variety performances to radio broadcasting and later to television with the advent of Ireland's first television service in 1962. Lambert's work was innovative in several ways and hugely influenced both the development of children's television and the practice of puppetry.

Chapter 1 introduces and contextualises this research. An overview of the characteristics of puppet performance underlines the similarities and distinctions between it and other types of performance. A review of historical literature relating to the performance of puppetry demonstrates the extent to which the practice of this art form has been understated in Ireland. This chapter also details the methodology adopted for this work, the rationale behind the choices made and the research's contribution to knowledge.

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[15] John Phillips, 'D'Arcs in Dublin' in *Theatre Notebook*, XLVIII, no. 1 (1994), p. 34.

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 present each of the case studies as they were published, prefaced with an extended abstract orienting the article within the context of this dissertation to highlight its contribution to answering the research questions of this dissertation.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from each of the case studies that respond to the research questions posed by this work. The conclusion provides a critical synthesis of the overall work and the contribution to addressing the core research question.

The presentation of the four research articles – and the structure of this study – is in keeping with Dublin City University's guidelines for a PhD by Publication.

1.4 Puppet Performance

To consider the impact and significance of puppetry and the puppet theatre in Ireland, it is useful to define this type of performance by underlining the similarities and distinctions between it and other types of performance. One distinguishing feature is the role of audience in puppet performances, which is more significant than for other audiences.

1.4.1 What is a Puppet?

A puppet is an object that is animated by a human to communicate with an audience. It ceases to exist as a puppet without either the human animator or the audience – even if the only audience is the human animator themselves. Without a puppeteer, a marionette (string puppet) is a doll with strings. Blumenthal goes to the heart of puppetry in answering this question: 'Whenever someone endows an inanimate object with life force and casts it in a scenario, a puppet is born.'[16] Irish artist, writer and prop-maker, Desmond MacNamara, describes a puppet as 'any sculptural or pictorial representation of a human or animal, which by means of articulation and movement can be used for a dramatic purpose'.[17] Frank Proschan's definition of puppets as 'material images of humans, animals or spirits that are created, displayed or manipulated' echoes that of MacNamara, where both have suggested an intention to represent something other than the object itself.[18]

Instinctively, the image of a puppet in the western world has long been that of an animated object imitating a human or animal, typically as a form of children's popular entertainment. Despite this popular impression, this is not a wholly accurate description of a puppet or how it has been used over centuries or how it continues to be used.

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[16] Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry and Puppets: An Illustrated World Survey* (London, 2005), p. 11.

[17] Desmond MacNamara, *Puppetry* (1966), p. 14.

[18] F. Proschan, 'The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects in Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects from Semiotic Perspectives' in *Semiotica La Haye*, xliii, no. 1–4 (1983), p. 4.

American puppeteer and author Paul McPharlin adopted an apparently uncomplicated definition of puppets as 'theatrical figures animated under human control'[19] Puppet Theatre historian Henry Jurkowski similarly described a puppet as being 'intended for theatre performance as a representation of man or other creatures'.[20] However, describing puppets as theatrical figures is to restrict puppet performance to just being a form of theatre or puppet theatre. But puppets are used in many otherer settings and for other purposes, including in education and therapy.[21] Such definitions also suggest that puppets are acting in *loco humano* as they replicate human drama on a miniature stage and that puppets are only acting in place of human actors. That is to subjugate the puppet theatre to being a representation of human theatrical performance, rather than a performance genre of its own.

Many practitioners have emphatically rejected descriptions of puppet performance as an imitation of human theatre: 'the puppet theatre must not ever, ever be a miniature reproduction of the big theatre, having its own laws made by its own conditions'.[22] Other puppeteers point to the ability of a puppet to communicate in a way that can be more powerful than human acting: 'A puppet is a puppet – not an imitation actor. The actor can represent an idea – the puppet *is* that idea. It is the actor raised to an abstraction – the mask from which the actor has withdrawn.'[23]

Defining puppetry as a representation of another kind of performance is to completely understate – if not to deny – the unique ability of puppetry to engage with an audience or express something in a very different way. A human actor could conceivably be the human character they are portraying. It is entirely credible that the human actor could experience – in real life – any of the things that their character is experiencing. However, a jumble of wood and strings could never, in any circumstances, experience the reality of the character they are portraying.

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[19] Paul McPharlin, 'Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival' (MA thesis thesis, Wayne University, Detroit, 1938), p. 1.
McPharlin also considered this definition as a performer when he provided it in Paul McPharlin, *A Repertory of Marionette Plays* (New York, 1929).

[20] Henryk Jurkowski and Penny Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century* (Lempeter, Wales, 1996), p. 8.

[21] A useful overview of the use of puppets in this way is Caroline Astell-Burt, *I Am the Story: The Art of Puppetry in Education and Therapy* (2002).

[22] Nina Efimova and Elena Mitcoff (translator), *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre: Including its Discoveries in Making and Performing with Hand-Puppets, Rod-Puppets and Shadow-Figures, Now Disclosed for All* (Limited Edition, Birmingham, MI, 1935), p. 106.

[23] From a leaflet written by Puppeteer Barry Smith in 1975 quoted in Penny Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice by Penny Francis - Research - Royal Holloway, University of London* (Readings in Theatre Practice, 2012), p. 173.

Therefore, a puppet can be considered as an object that, through animation during a performance, inhabits the world of human performance. This transformation is most explicitly demonstrated in the story of Pinocchio, where a wooden doll is animated with a life of its own. Gross describes this aspect of puppetry as when 'the puppet serves as an ambassador or pilgrim to human beings from the world of things. The puppet is the material thing that has learned to act, and partly to speak our language'.

While the animation of any inanimate object could be used for performance, many puppeteers are keen to draw a distinction between puppetry and *object theatre*, regarding the latter as being the animation of everyday objects that are not designed or intended to be manipulated as performance characters.[24]

1.4.2 A Taxonomy of Puppetry

Within puppetry, there are a range of types of puppets, which are usually categorised into types defined by the way in which they are animated or manipulated.

Hand or glove puppets are operated from beneath the puppet, with the puppeteer's hand inside the puppet, sometimes directly manipulating the limbs of the puppet with individual fingers. The most common use of hand puppets can be seen at a modern-day Punch & Judy booth. This type of puppetry is easily transported and set up, making it the most mobile of puppet theatres. The best-known Irish hand puppet is the television character of Bosco, which featured on RTE television from 1979 to 1987.

Marionettes or string puppets are operated from above using strings running from a controller to each of the limbs and occasionally using additional strings for special effects or actions. Marionettes offer the most effective way in which puppets can visually emulate the human or animal form. In some instances, there is a metal rod or heavy wire protruding from the top of the puppet and may also have a second rod controlling the arm of the puppet, which is typical of Sicilian puppets. String puppets are more cumbersome to animate and to transport, making marionette theatres more expensive to operate. The original character of Punch was a marionette originally and performed in theatre settings, but as the need for new audiences required a travelling version, Punch became a glove puppet.[25]

Rod puppets are operated from beneath by means of wooded or metal rods. Rod puppets can offer a combination of the attributes of hand and string puppets, being operated from below

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[24] Claudia Orenstein, 'The Dramaturgy is in the Object' in *Reading the Puppet Stage: Reflections on the Dramaturgy of Performing Objects* (2023), pp 32–56.

[25] William J. Lawrence, 'The Immortal Mr Punch' in *The Living Age*, cccviii, no. 3994 (1921), pp 243–247.

but providing a human or animal like form. Often used in television and film productions, the best-known twentieth Century examples are those used in the Muppet Show television series.

Shadow puppets are flat silhouetted objects manipulated between a translucent screen and a bright light source. The puppeteer is behind and below (or sometimes to the side of) the puppet. Shadow puppets provide a two-dimensional representation of the world. This form of puppet performance is most common in China, India and in South-East Asia.

Body puppets are larger puppets that require the manipulator to wear the puppet, using their own body to manipulate the puppet. This type of puppet is larger-than-life and is typically seen in street parades. The best known of these puppets would be some of the larger characters on Sesame Street, such as Big Bird. In Ireland, the Macnas theatre company have used the concept of body puppets with great success in creating large-scale outdoor spectacle events.

Ventriloquism is the only form of puppetry where the puppeteer is deliberately visible, typically appearing alongside the puppet or doll. The ventriloquist manipulates the puppet’s head and mouth by placing a hand through the doll’s back onto a handle below the doll’s head. The handle may have additional triggers to aminate the doll’s ears, eyebrows or for special effects. Because the puppeteer is visible to the audience, the performance skill is in having the audience believe that the voice of the doll is coming from the doll, rather than from the ventriloquist. This suggests that an effective ventriloquist is one who can create a voice for their doll without being seen to move their own lips. However, if a ventriloquist can animate the character of the doll to such an extent that it strongly engages the attention of the audience, then the technical aspect of being seen to move their lips is of secondary importance as the audience engage with the doll as if it were living. Ventriloquism was at its height of performance success as part of variety and music hall entertainment in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

While classifying types of puppets according to their method of manipulation is typical, alternative taxonomies describe them variously in terms of their function or impact as a form of artistic expression. John Bell considers different types of puppets in terms of their method of construction, their degree of realism or their performance style.[26]

Taking the manipulator / puppet dynamic as a starting point, Stephen Kaplin classifies different types of puppets in terms of the distance between the two and the ratio of one to the other.[27]

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[26] John Bell, *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects* (New York, 2001).

[27] Stephen Kaplin, ‘A Puppet Tree: A Model for the Field of Puppet Theatre’ in *The Drama Review*, xliii, no. 3 (1999), pp 28–35.

In terms of proximity, Kaplin distinguishes between a glove puppet on the performer's hand, a string puppet at a slight remove and an animatronic puppet controlled remotely. Alongside distance, Kaplin classifies puppets according to the ratio of the number of manipulators used to control a single puppet or by the number of puppets manipulated by a single puppeteer.

Whatever the method of classification, all types of puppets share certain very specific common attributes that distinguishes puppet theatre from other forms of theatrical performance, most clearly from actors on the human stage.

For all puppet forms, performance is ultimately a specific combination of the puppet and the puppeteer, making each such pairing a unique form of expression. It is this joint enterprise that is common to all puppetry performance as either party cannot perform as a puppet without the other. Each pairing provides a unique form of expression. The same puppet operated by another puppeteer provides a very different performance, as does the original puppeteer using an alternative puppet.

All types of puppets serve the primary function of storytelling or expression, being used to convey narratives, emotions or themes and are particularly effective in reflecting cultural values and societal issues. The are also inanimate objects that are animated in some way and it is this very act of animation that is at the heart of puppetry. A wooden puppet walking across a stage easily garners the attention of an audience, but a human actor doing the same thing is of no particular interest.

1.4.3 The Puppet as an Actor

Writing in 1897, British poet and critic, Arthur Symons, in *An Apology for Puppets*, put forward the perspective mentioned earlier that puppets were actors in themselves – not objects imitating human actors. However, Symons also put forward specific attributes that underpin this distinction and help to define the unique nature of the puppet as an actor: 'The marionette may be relied upon. He will respond to an indication without reserve or revolt; an error on this part (we are all human) will certainly be the fault of the author; he can be trained to perfection. As he is painted, so will he smile; as the wires lift or lower his hands, so will his gestures be; and he will dance when his legs are set in motion.'[28] Oscar Wilde echoed Symons's perspective in observing that 'the personality of the actor is often a source of danger in the perfect presentation of a work of art', but that puppets 'are admirably docile' and

[28] Originally published in *Saturday Review* in July 1897 and reprinted in Arthur Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory* (London, 1909), p. 3.

'recognise the presiding intellect of the dramatist'.[29] Essentially, puppets are tools in the hands of their manipulators. They act as a conduit for the puppeteer's performance and engagement with the audience.

The English actor, director and theorist, Edward Gordon Craig wrote a series of books and essays about the theatre in the early part of the twentieth century and whose 'influence can almost be said to have fathered the puppet theatre as a medium of mainstream theatre'. [30] Craig contended that the medium was primarily about performance, rather than being a derivative, or extension, of the literature that provided its scripts. This focus on performance highlighted the role and function of the actor within the theatre and, in a bid to consider the actor as a conduit to the audience, Craig proposed that the marionette was the ideal actor. 'The puppet is not only seen as the perfect substitute for the living actor (and particularly the actress), but as the ultimate work of art. If theatre was to be the total art form, then the puppet would represent the total and absolute artifice.' [31] This perspective was to exaggerate the impact of substituting a human actor's performance with that of an object, but the replacement of a human actor with a puppet transforms the nature of the performance in a fundamental way.

In an article written in 1907, Craig coined the term *über-marionette* to describe his concept of the perfect actor: one who did not allow their humanity to affect the performance, ensuring that the creator remained in total control of the work. While Craig wrote and produced plays for puppets, the über-marionette concept was very much about his perception of an ideal performance within the human theatre. Craig's writings highlighted the potential of the puppet theatre as a serious theatrical medium, as a separate art form and as a means through which creators could perform their material exactly as they had intended. [32]

Expanding on Craig's perspective, American puppeteer and author Marjorie Batchelder suggested that 'direct characterisation is the puppet actor's strongest quality. A puppet is the character is portrays; it is not a human being dressed up and pretending to be that character'.

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[29] Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.), *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1962), p. 311.

[30] Penny Francis, 'The Rise of the Puppeteer' in *Annual lecture of The British Centre Union Internationale de la Marionette given on the Puppet Theatre Barge in London on 3 May 1997.* (London, 1998), p. 12. An overview of Craig's writings on the theatre, including his work on the puppet theatre can be found in J. Michael Walton, *Craig on Theatre* (1983).

[31] Olga Taxidou, 'A New "Art of the Theatre": Gordon Craig's "The Mask" (1908-29) and "The Marionette" (1918-19)' in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (2009), p. 795.

[32] Patrick Le Bœuf, 'On the Nature of Edward Gordon Craig's Über-Marionette' in *New Theatre Quarterly*, xxvi, no. 2 (2010), pp 102–114.

[33] As such, the puppet is a far more powerful means of expression than a human actor as it does not need to be interpreted by the audience.

Whatever the kind of puppet and whether one considers a puppet as merely representing a human actor or as a performance object, puppets have very particular attributes that allow their use in performance in ways that are not possible for actors. At a fundamental level, puppets can physically do things that human actors cannot. Blumenthal echoes the superiority of puppets, contending that 'live actors, with the limited agility and endurance, are ill suited for such classic stage business as, say, flying and haemorrhaging'.[34] Puppets can defy gravity, dismantle themselves, transform into other objects or be destroyed – all in front of a live audience. What do these physical attributes mean for the puppet as a performance object, or actor? These properties suggest that a puppet is more effective in situations where they are not limited by having to emulate the human stage. However, most puppet performances use puppets that portray human or animal characters. As such, the puppet has the presence of the human character, but without the restrictions of being a human actor. This combination means that a puppet may portray a real character, while dispensing with the shackles of human reality. This is the magical impact of puppet performance: the unique ability of the puppet as an actor.

Perhaps it is the way in which puppets can transcend the limitations of human performance that allows them to be such effective crude vulgar objects of satire and on other occasions to be considered such suitable children's entertainment? Irish puppet characters Podge & Rodge hosted a television chat show in which they made outrageous comments about their guests and posed questions that would never be accepted from a human host. The uncertainty of exactly why they were able to do so with impunity is clear from the reaction of an RTE television executive when asked to explain it: 'Everyone knows what Rodge and Podge are like - they get away with a lot of stuff. It's the fact that they're not real people asking questions to guests that allows them to get away with it. Perhaps that's why we're not being sued by anyone about their comments.'[35]

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[33] Marjorie Batchelder and Vivian Michael, *Hand-and-Rod Puppets: A new adventure in the art of puppetry, (Ohio State University Adventures in education; fine and applied arts series)* (1947), p. 288.

[34] Blumenthal, *Puppetry and Puppets: An Illustrated World Survey*, pp 87–88.

[35] Simon Byrne, 'Rude Rodge and Podge dodge TV lawsuits' in *The People [EIRE Edition]* (London (UK), United Kingdom, 12 Feb. 2006), sec. News, p. 27.

1.4.4 Puppetry Audiences

The first quarter of the twentieth-first century saw a resurgence in the use of puppets on stage and in film across a range of genres far beyond children's entertainment.[36] Stage productions such as *The Lion King* (1997), *Avenue Q* (2003), *War Horse* (2007) and *Hand to God* (2015) have enjoyed commercial and critical success. There has been parallel cinematic success using puppets in the same period, including *Team America: World Police* (2004). Ventriloquism has also enjoyed a resurgence, particularly within stand-up comedy, such as the popularity and success of international artists like Jeff Dunham (USA) and Nina Conti (UK). In Ireland, the puppet character duo Podge and Rodge were very successful on television, including *A Scare at Bedtime* (1997-2006) and *The Podge and Rodge Show* (2006-2010, 2018-19) which were also broadcast on BBC and on the Paramount Comedy Channel. Very few of these performances were aimed at a children's audience, despite a general perception that puppets are primarily used for that purpose. Those behind such use of puppets often try to avoid the use of the word puppet in describing their work: 'because of negative associations: close association with children and low status amongst the arts', instead using such phrases as puppet theatre, figure theatre, object theatre and animation theatre.[37]

A key aspect of this cinematic and stage success for puppetry is to be found on the other side of the screen or footlights: the audience. Moreso than other types of performance, the audience is an important enabler of puppetry performance. Tillis defines puppets as 'figures perceived by an audience to be objects that are given design, movement, and frequently, speech, in such a way that the audience imagines them to have life', which suggests that it is the perception of the audience that gives life to a puppet.[38] Blumenthal's fundamental definition of a puppet points to the audience as the primary element in puppet performance: 'If it performed for an audience other than the person controlling it, then it was a puppet. If it performed only for the benefit of the person playing with it, then it was a doll'.[39]

The importance of an audience within puppet performances is much greater than the importance of audience for the human stage. As Pullman points out, 'The experience of being in the audience when a play or an opera is being performed is not simply passive.'[40] However, as Frank Proschan has observed, the very realisation of a puppet performance is a joint

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[36] Episale, 'The Emerging Puppetry Renaissance'.

[37] Marie Kruger, 'What's in a name? The sense or non-sense of labelling puppets in contemporary Western theatre', ed. Zoe Strecker, in *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, i, no. 1 (2014), p. 2.

[38] Steve Tillis, *Toward an aesthetics of the puppet: Puppetry as a theatrical art* (New York, 1992), p. 28.

[39] Blumenthal, *Puppetry and Puppets: An Illustrated World Survey*, p. 229.

[40] Philip Pullman, 'Theatre - the True Key Stage' in *Guardian* (Manchester, 30 Mar. 2004).

enterprise: 'puppet shows are not fixed and frozen in form. Rather they are a cocreation of puppeteer and audience.'[41] For either type of performance, there must be some collusion between the performers and the audience. Human actors could conceivably be any of the characters the actor portrays, but a puppet made of wood or cloth could never actually be the person or animal they portray. Audiences must agree to some suspension of disbelief so that the human actor may act as innkeeper, vagabond, military hero or thief. However, it is only with an absolute suspension of disbelief by an audience that allows a puppet to portray such characters.

Janet Banfield recalls her encounter, as a student, with *The Muppet Show*'s *Kermit* when the puppet spoke at the Oxford Union in an event that made national headlines. She described how she regarded *Kermit* as 'real to me' as a real material object and as a real character. However, she also observed that 'neither objects nor frogs talk, run theatres, ride bicycles or do any of the other things that Kermit the Frog has done in his illustrious career. This is the power of the puppet: We know that it is not a living thing, yet we commit to it, believe in it and relate to it as if it was'.[42] It is such a committal by the audience that realises the puppet as a dramatic character and enables puppets to perform. The role of the audience does not just enable the performance of puppets for their benefit, but the audience's complicity in suspending reality enables the puppeteer themselves to perform. Francis describes this as 'the energy needed to enliven the object has to be powerful enough to carry to the audience who, if complicit, conveys their conviction (of the object's liveness) back to the puppeteer.'[43]

Puppetry's dependence on a suspension of disbelief by an adult audience is seen most starkly in ventriloquism, where the manipulation is carried out in full view and where the vent doll is given voice by the ventriloquist in sight of – and with the unspoken collusion of – the audience. It is the audience that confers meaning on the puppet, rather than the human actor conveying meaning when playing a human role on stage. This is another reason why puppetry can be more outrageous than is acceptable from human performers. Essentially, a person can't really object if they have taken offence from something in which they have provided meaning and significance. Both these aspects can be seen in the stage musical *Avenue Q* where the main characters are ventriloqual puppets that are accompanied alongside by their ventriloquists

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[41] As quoted in Dina Sherzer and Joel Sherzer, *Humor and Comedy in Puppetry: Celebration in Popular Culture* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1987), p. 2.

[42] Janet Banfield, *Spaces of Puppets in Popular Culture: Grotesque Geographies of the Borderscape* (Routledge Research in Culture, Space and Identity, London and New York), p. 1.

[43] Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice by Penny Francis - Research - Royal Holloway, University of London*, p. 18.

throughout the performance. *Avenue Q*'s puppets sing about sex, pornography and casual racism in a way in which it is hard to imagine it being acceptable for human actors to do.

The suitability of puppetry to being more controversial or satirical is also due to the anonymity – or being at one remove – of the puppeteer. This provides a layer of separation between the performer and the content, allowing puppet theatre to tackle sensitive or controversial topics more easily than human theatre. This attribute can be seen in the successful use of puppets to communicate with children in a therapeutic setting, where children can communicate with the puppet, rather than the adult behind it.[44] In the same way, being at one remove provides some insulation for puppeteers in satirical or even insulting content with an adult audience, allowing them to push the boundaries of acceptable engagement.

Puppetry's appeal to a diverse and contrasting range of audiences and is something that has long distinguished the art form. McPharlin observed that 'so universal has been the hold of the puppet on all classes where the theatre is known that it gives an amusing refutation of social class distinctions. While it has amused the townfolk in the marketplace it has, with the selfsame play, delighted the gentry in the manor and even the nobility in the castle.'[45] In Ireland, audiences abandoned eighteenth-century mainstream legitimate theatre in favour of the satirical jibes of Mr Punch poking fun at the establishment on Dublin's Capel Street. Nineteenth-century Dublin audiences flocked to a marionette theatre to see characters from the European royalty of the time. Early twentieth-century audiences enjoyed marionette opera at the Irish national theatre. A puppet in a box provided educational programming for a twentieth-century Irish television children's audience for seventeen years. A duo of puppets hosted a starkly contrasting adult-themed late-night Irish television programme for a very different audience for fifteen years of the early twenty-first century. Despite the contrasting audiences, each of these was a puppet show of one kind or another. What is it about puppet performance that makes it so versatile that it can push the boundaries of public decency beyond that which would be acceptable for human actors, but can still be considered an ideal medium for engaging with children?

Once an audience has 'bought in' to a belief that the puppet performance is real, they have crossed the line between fantasy and reality. The lewd commentary can be more easily dismissed or excused because it isn't said by a person. Because these are the words of a puppet they are not taken as seriously, so their impact or offence cannot be seriously felt –

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[44] Richard B. Carter and Perry S. Mason, 'The Selection and Use of Puppets in Counseling' in *Professional School Counseling*, i, no. 5 (1998), pp 50–53.

[45] McPharlin, 'Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival', p. 2.

despite being enunciated in public. It is as if the lewd and grotesque can be accepted as fantastical and real at the same time and this surrealism allows performers to create scenarios that might be too outrageous or controversial for human actors. Such surrealism can provoke laughter while simultaneously prompting audiences to reflect on serious issues that might not otherwise be the case. The ability of puppets to embody both human traits and fantastical elements creates a powerful tool for satire.

Whatever the range of audiences for puppet performance, it is certainly the case that puppet theatre is particularly effective for younger audiences. This is partly because children most easily admit to the collusion between puppeteer and the audience: 'We pretend these things are real, so the story can happen.'[46] Blumenthal attributes the popularity of puppet theatre with children to puppets having 'a unique rapport with very young people. For both groups, the border between fantasy and reality is porous'.[47] Indeed, research around children's theatre demonstrates that children learn the role of audience at an early age, allowing that 'puppets are inanimate objects that, when watched by an audience, are invested with life and motion and character.'[48]

This research demonstrates the wide variety of audiences to which puppet performance is suited. As discussed, audience is a far more significant element of performance within puppetry than it is within other forms of expression. By the very nature of the performance, puppetry audiences must concede to a great deal of collusion for the performance to happen. In doing so, they have already blurred the line between reality and fantasy. Such an experience is open to a variety of audiences as each will define the experience in their own terms.

While this work has highlighted the work of four individual men, it has also illustrated that puppet performance is only achieved through joint enterprise, primarily between the puppet and puppeteer. This can be more complex, as when the Dublin Marionette Group used separate puppeteers to manipulate the marionettes and to voice their lines. Recalling the role of audience in suspending disbelief to allow a puppet show to be realised, such joint enterprise extends the network to include puppet, puppeteer(s) and audience.

However, Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) emphasises the significance of all elements of such creative and cultural networks, both human and non-human, insisting that non-humans

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[46] Pullman, 'Theatre - the True Key Stage'.

[47] Blumenthal, *Puppetry and Puppets: An Illustrated World Survey*, p. 187.

[48] Matthew Reason, '"Did You Watch the Man or Did You Watch the Goose?" Children's Responses to Puppets in Live Theatre' in *New Theatre Quarterly*, xxiv, no. 4 (2008), p. 337.

are just as important as humans in shaping social interactions and outcomes.[49] In puppet performance, by definition, the non-human actor – or actant – is of particular significance. According to Callon, the importance of Actor-Network Theory is in uncovering the sometimes unseen or acknowledged actors and forces that shape the performing arts.[50]

Applying ANT to the puppet theatre recognises the role of those whose names did not appear in the titles of these puppet companies. This includes the designers, producers and writers, but also musicians and 'figure workers' advertised for by these companies. In the case of each of the men featured in the four case studies, their wives played a significant role in the success of their enterprise, sometimes in easily defined positions, but often in less distinctive but just as important roles.

An interesting aspect of Latour's theory is the contention that each element (actant) of the network has agency, whether human or non-human, which would include the place of performance. Location has been a particularly important actant for puppet performance. As popular entertainment at the fairs and market venues of the eighteenth century, the location was a strong determinant in defining the rakish nature of the performance. Comparing that to the Dublin Marionette Group's performances at the Peacock Theatre or as part of the Wexford Opera Festival presented as elements of high culture demonstrates the extent to which location is an active actant in defining the nature of puppet performance.

This would seem to be realised in a very stark manner when a puppet character, although created and performed by a puppeteer, seems to take on a life of its own by saying and doing things that, while in-character, are instinctive and impulsive and sometimes seem to surprise the puppeteer – despite them being in physical control of the puppet. As a puppeteer, the author has had the experience of a puppet saying things in an improvised audience interaction that was not foreseen by the puppeteer. Eugene Lambert's ventriloquist doll, Finnegan has been heard to say things in a performance that would embarrass the puppeteer. Ventriloquist Nina Conti can frequently be seen laughing hysterically at things she has audience members say while she manipulates them using a 'vent mask' so they appear to be ventriloquist's dolls. Conti laughs as if surprised or outraged that someone would say such things. Latour might explain this phenomenon as the network being dynamic and unstable, where the relationships between actants shift and change throughout the conceptualisation, rehearsal and

[49] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2007).

[50] Michel Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay' in *The Sociological Review*, xxxii, no. 1_suppl (1984), pp 196–233.

performance. ANT highlights that the performance is not solely determined by human agency but by the interplay of all these interconnected actants.

1.5 Historical Puppet Theatre Literature

A Travelling Show (1892) by Richard Moynan (Courtesy of the late John Rehill).

This image illustrates the 'refutation of social class distinctions', where an Irish travelling puppet show was performed for children who could afford to pay, but also enjoyed by those who could not.[51] *The Bottler can be seen 'drumming up business' for the performance similar to the way amplified music from an ice cream van in modern times.*

1.5.1 Introduction

To understand the significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland, one needs to consider its evolution and development in its various forms. Domestic and visiting puppet performances have been regarded as being on various points of a spectrum of performance from popular entertainment to formal theatre.

Ireland is one of a very few countries about which a national history of puppetry and the puppet theatre has not been written. This is particularly striking when one considers the

[51] McPharlin, 'Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival', p. 2.

richness of Irish theatre, culture and entertainment and the mark that Ireland has made within these sectors internationally. Irish artists, writers and actors have made more of an impact internationally than could be expected from a country of Ireland's size. However, the existence of substantial puppet theatre histories of other countries and the absence of an Irish history might suggest that puppet performance in Ireland was not significant but mention of the puppet theatre in Ireland across other publications suggests otherwise.[52]

To establish a grounding for this research, this section first considers the common themes within a study of the puppet theatre and the practice of puppetry, including its development over time as a form of expression. It then examines puppet theatre histories outside Ireland and puppet theatre in Irish histories to illustrate the extent of this performance genre in Ireland. Finally, it reviews material from theatrical biographies and entertainment and theatrical trade newspapers to understand the extent to which actors, entertainers and performers were involved in the puppet theatre in Ireland.

1.5.2 Common Themes

There is a universality across time and place about the puppet theatre. Paul McPharlin notes that 'the puppet has exercised a fascination for mankind since the invention of theatre', [53] while Cyril Beaumont contends that 'the puppet is as old as civilization itself'.[54] The reason for this universality has been a matter of discussion amongst practitioners and academics. Marjorie Batchelder posed the question 'what qualities inherent in the puppet theatre have given it sufficient vitality to maintain itself as an independent art, and what fundamental appeal it contains which has insured its popularity among so many different kinds of people?'[55]

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[52] National histories of the puppet theatre include Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*; Martin MacGilp, *A Tiber Idol: Mr Punch in Scotland* (Inverness, 2012); André-Charles Gervais, *Marionnettes et marionnettistes de France* (Paris, 1947); Hans R. Purschke, *The Puppet Theatre in Germany* (Frankfort, 1957); John McCormick, *The Italian Puppet Theater: A History* (Jefferson, N.C., 2010); Rodolphe de. Warsage, *Historie du célèbre theéâtre liégeois de marioneetes* (5th Ed., Bruxelles, 1905); Alfred Altherr and Pierre Gauchat, *Marionetten* (Erlenbach-Zürich, 1926); John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914* (Cambridge, 1998); Erik Kolar and Jan Malik, *The Puppet Theatre in Czechoslovakia* (1970); Paul McPharlin, *The Puppet Theatre in America: A History 1524-1948 With a Supplement: Puppets in America Since 1948* (Boston, 1969); Phyllis T. Dircks, *American Puppetry: Collections, History and Performance* (Jefferson, NC, 2004); Kenneth B. McKay, *Puppetry in Canada: An art to enchant* (Ontario, 1980); Sergei Vladimirovich Obraztsov, *The Chinese Puppet Theatre* (London, 1961); A. C. (Adolphe Clarence) Scott, *The Puppet Theatre of Japan* (Tokyo, 1963).

[53] McPharlin, 'Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival', p. 1.

[54] Cyril W Beaumont, *Puppets and the Puppet Stage,* (1938), p. 6.

[55] Marjorie Batchelder, *Hand-and-Rod Puppets: A new adventure in the art of puppetry,* (Ohio State University Adventures in education; fine and applied arts series., 1947), p. 278.

Attempting to understand the concept of a puppet, Penny Francis refers to the animation of divine figures dating back to pre-history and the use of inanimate objects to represent a supernatural being. Kenneth Gross suggests that puppetry is more related to the supernatural than to the human world: 'There is something in the puppet that ties its dramatic life more to the shapes of dreams and fantasy, the poetry of the unconscious, than to any realistic drama of human life.'[56] Jurkowski identifies the period of antiquity when 'the transition from the ritual figure to the theatrical puppet manipulated by a professional player, who might be involved in other practices or entertainments' occurred.[57] John Minniear describes the new role for puppets as 'when the theatre overshadowed the temple, the once monstrous divinities were transformed into delightful caricatures'.[58] Whether for ritual or performance, Francis contends that 'puppetry is about that belief in the spirit within the material, and it will only die on the day we decide there is no spirit in anything, that everything is only matter and chemistry, including humans and animals.'[59]

As mentioned earlier, the suspension of disbelief is central to understanding puppetry. Steve Tillis describes this as one of three basic elements that are constant through all uses of puppets: 'the designated figure, the movement and the speech given to that figure, and the audience that knows the figure to be an instrument of theatre, and yet participates in the illusion it creates.'[60] Pia Banzhaf attempts to resolve the dichotomy of the inanimate and animate aspects of puppets and observes that 'our human nature urges us to make sense of observable things we encounter' and this is what urges us to suspend disbelief to allow us to accept the puppet as an animate entity.[61]

The place of puppetry within historical popular culture is widely acknowledged and often recorded in some detail. George Speaight considers the text of the puppet play in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* of 1614, which he describes as a 'robust and vulgar little drama' that is a 'ridiculous mixture and parody of two classical legends'.[62] The 1668 diary of Samuel Pepys describes his reaction to 'the Puppet-show of Whittington, which was pretty to see; and how

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[56] Kenneth Gross, 'The Madness of Puppets' in *The Hopkins Review*, ii, no. 2 (2009), p. 183.

[57] Jurkowski & Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*, p. 49.

[58] John Mohr Minniear, 'Marionette Opera: its history and literature' (North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1971), p. 6.

[59] Francis, 'The Rise of the Puppeteer', p. 3.

[60] Tillis, *Toward an aesthetics of the puppet: Puppetry as a theatrical art*, p. 7.

[61] Pia Banzhaf, 'The Ontology of the Puppet' in *Dolls and Puppets: Contemporaneity and Tradition* (Białystok, Poland, 2018), p. 9.

[62] Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, pp 57–60.

that idle thing doth work upon people that see it, and even myself too'.[63] Scott Shershow points to the dichotomy of Pepys' reaction: regarding the puppet show as 'that idle thing', suggesting that it is of no importance. Yet, Pepys records the experience in his diary and that it had an impact on the audience, including himself. Such a contradiction is often a hallmark of popular culture, where society does not place an inherent value on something, yet it is consumed and enjoyed by many members of that society.[64]

Increasing regulation and licensing of theatre was a feature of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, as official theatre attempted to keep their audiences for themselves and those in authority attempted to limit the opportunities for theatrical satire to be used against them. This was particularly the case in France and England, where the authorities introduced a ban on live performances by actors – other than within the approved theatres. Despite its increasing presence alongside conventional theatre, the puppet theatre invariably escaped, or avoided, such restrictions, being seen as not important enough to warrant the attention of the authorities. This added to the perception that the puppet theatre was 'alternative' in some way.

Eighteenth century puppeteers plied their trade wherever they could garner an audience, typically at fairs and fairgrounds. These were places of commerce, but also occasions of social interaction and colourful entertainment. Across France, Germany and Britain, puppetry provided much of this entertainment in portable booths, where the forerunner of today's Punch character could be seen in all his vulgarity.

Gradually, these fairground performers transitioned to performing for theatre-going audiences. As these wooden actors occupied the same venues as their live counterparts, they began to attract the same audiences. Existing stage productions were often re-enacted in puppet theatres but revised to include parts for Punch. The character was a disruptive influence, and might be described as 'a profane, lewd jester', 'the diversion of all the spectators… [and] a roaring, lewd, rakish, empty fellow'.[65]

All of this brought unprecedented success for the puppet theatre. Indeed, this period is regarded by many as a golden age of the puppetry as a form of entertainment and theatre. Theatre historian, George Speaight, regarded this period as the pinnacle of puppetry in England: 'Never before or since have the puppets played so effective and so well publicised a

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[63] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley (London, 1896), p. 110.
[64] Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and Popular Culture* (Ithaca, New York, 1995), p. 1.
[65] George Speaight, *Punch & Judy: a history* (Boston, 1970), p. 54.

part in fashionable society; never before or since have puppet theatres so successfully made themselves the talk of the town.'[66]

It is not surprising then, that the puppet theatre was regarded in many respects as acceptable an art form as mainstream theatre of the period. According to Henry Jurkowski this success positioned the puppet theatre as an equal with their human counterparts: 'Puppet theatre in England became an equal partner of other forms of theatre, because of the involvement of highly skilled craftsmen and artists. Writers, designers and actors, their activities limited by circumstances such as the Licensing Act (newly introduced in 1737), looked to puppetry for an alternative career, as it seemed to offer opportunities, especially for those with satirical intentions.'[67]

However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the fortunes of the puppet theatre had reversed. The marionette performances that had vied with human actors lost their popularity. The traditional marionette shows within the booths of fairs and fairgrounds fell away as audiences declined. Economic necessity dictated that the showmen simplify their offering and become mobile in constant search of new audiences. It was at this point that the character of Punch, long the star of the marionette stage '… was literally, thrown on to the streets. From about the year 1800 he had no other existence than that of a glove puppet.'[68]

The resilience of puppetry as a means of expression and form of entertainment is evident as puppetry reinvented itself to ensure its survival. 'At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a qualitative change in the puppets of the *commedia dell'arte* became suddenly apparent and the 'street comedy' was born.'[69]

Lamenting the passing of the Italian *Fantoccini* puppet performances, Joseph Strutt vividly describes the lot of 'the modern puppet-show man' in 1801:

> In the present day the puppet-show man travels about the streets when the weather will permit, and carries his motions, with the theatre itself, upon his back! The exhibition takes place in the open air; and the precarious income of the miserable itinerant

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[66] Speaight's The History of the English Puppet Theatre covers the particular importance of the puppet theatre in eighteenth century England. Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*.

[67] Henryk Jurkowski and Penny Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: The Twentieth Century* (Lempeter, Wales, 1998). p. 174.

[68] Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, p. 180.

[69] Jurkowski & Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*, p. 304.

> depends entirely on the voluntary contributions of the spectators, which, as far as one may judge from the square appearance he usually makes, is very trifling.[70]

Although the life of an early nineteenth century puppeteer was difficult, it did ensure the transition from their eighteenth-century heyday to become a commercial success performing for the lower orders. John McCormick contrasts the fortunes of the nineteenth century puppeteers: 'Banned, marginalised, tolerated or neglected, puppets were a major form of entertainment of the subordinate classes in the nineteenth century.'[71]

As ever in the history of the puppet theatre, society's attitude towards the entertainment was to change during the nineteenth century as puppet shows were brought in from the cold: 'While the puppet show emerged as a low-brow street entertainment during the first decades of the nineteenth century, by 1850 it had been hijacked by the middle and upper classes and began to appear with increasing frequency in fashionable drawing rooms.'[72]

If the eighteenth century was the golden age of the puppet theatre, then the second half of the nineteenth century was the golden age of the marionette theatre. Increased urbanisation and the growth of leisure time provided audiences with money to spend on entertainment. As Lee Jackson observed, 'the Victorians *were* amused and it could prove to be a very profitable business'.[73] The popularity of the Victorian marionette theatres was partly based on the suitability of marionettes to look lifelike, thereby addressing the desire of the period for realism: 'The greatest accolade for marionette showpeople was to be told that the figures could be mistaken for human beings.'[74]

The turn of the twentieth century brought a reappraisal of the puppet theatre. As puppetry had previously made the transition from religious expression to popular entertainment, a definition of *Modern* Puppetry saw it reconsidered as a form of theatrical art.

Writing in 1897, British poet and critic, Arthur Symons, in *An Apology for Puppets*, put forward the contention that puppets were actors in themselves – not objects imitating human actors.

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[70] Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London, 1838), p. 167.

[71] McCormick & Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*, p. III.

[72] Rosalind Crone, 'Mr and Mrs Punch in Nineteenth-Century England' in *The Historical Journal*, xlix, no. 4 (2006), p. 1055.

[73] Lee Jackson, *Palaces of Pleasure: From Music Halls to the Seaside to Football, How the Victorians Invented Mass Entertainment* (New Haven and London, 2019), p. 3.

[74] John McCormick, Clodagh McCormick and John Phillips, *The Victorian Marionette Theatre* (Iowa City, 2004), p. 5.

'The marionette may be relied upon. He will respond to an indication without reserve or revolt; an error on this part (we are all human) will certainly be the fault of the author; he can be trained to perfection. As he is painted, so will he smile; as the wires lift or lower his hands, so will his gestures be; and he will dance when his legs are set in motion.'[75] Marjorie Batchelder, echoed Symons' perspective that 'direct characterisation is the puppet actor's strongest quality. A puppet is the character it portrays; it is not a human being dressed up and pretending to be that character' [76]

In a series of books and essays about the theatre published throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Gordon Craig contended that the medium was primarily about performance, rather than being a derivative, or extension, of the literature that provided its scripts.[77] This focus on performance highlighted the role and function of the actor within the theatre. In a bid to consider the actor as a conduit to the audience, Craig proposed that the marionette was the ideal actor.

The puppet revival was not limited to theoretical musings of what might be possible. The realisation of the puppet theatre as an art form radically altered the practice of puppetry. 'Art puppetry introduced a different set of social, cultural, ideological and aesthetic values. The puppeteer began to be perceived as an artist rather than a showman, and the puppet for what it was and not exclusively for what it might represent.'[78]

German poet and playwright, Paul Brann, frustrated by what he could accomplish on the human stage, brought together a group of creative artists in 1906 to create the Marionettentheater Münchner Künstler (Marionette Theatre of Munich Artists). Described by puppet theatre historian, Henry Jurkowski as 'one of the most famous of all puppet theatres… which well represents the Modernist idea of "art as artefact" and which greatly influenced the development of the European theatre'.[79] The German-Swiss painter and writer, Gunter Böhmer, in a publication based on the puppet collection of the city of Munich, later underlines this approach: 'Only recently has there been consideration of the possibilities of theatre

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[75] Originally published in *Saturday Review* in July 1897 and reprinted in Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory*, p. 3.

[76] Batchelder & Michael, *Hand-and-Rod Puppets: A new adventure in the art of puppetry, (Ohio State University Adventures in education; fine and applied arts series)*, p. 288.

[77] An overview of Craig's writings on the theatre, including his work on the puppet theatre can be found in Walton, *Craig on Theatre*.

[78] McCormick & Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*, p. 208.

[79] Henryk Jurkowski and Penny Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: The Twentieth Century* (Lempeter, Wales, 1998), p. 76.

specifically for puppets. These lie in the full exploitation of illusion and surrealist opportunities which are not available in the actors' theatre.'[80]

1.5.3 Puppet Theatre Histories outside Ireland

Several of the historical accounts of the puppet theatre in other countries include references to the puppet theatre in Ireland. Such allusions were made because of the itinerant nature of the puppet theatre. Like so many other forms of performance, the economics of acquiring new audiences required that the spectacle came to the public, rather than the other way around. It is also notable that some of the international references to puppet theatre in Ireland were made because of the significance of those activities in Ireland to the wider practice of puppetry and the puppet theatre.

Henry Jurkowski's two-volume *A History of European Puppetry* provides a detailed analysis of puppet performance as a form of theatre from its origins to the late twentieth century. This substantial work focuses on the puppet theatre of Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, France, Germany, Italy and Britain. While events in Ireland are referenced, they are considered within an analysis of English theatre or a demonstration of French or Italian influences.[81]

Closer to home, George Speaight's *History of the English Puppet Theatre* describes much of what might have been expected from the activities of the puppet theatre in Ireland during the same periods – including when Ireland was socially, economically, and politically part of the British empire. Speaight also includes some material about some Irish-based puppeteers, who were significant within the context of puppetry in Britain and Ireland. The author regrets his inability to write further on the subject: 'The history of the Irish puppet theatre calls for more detailed treatment than is possible here. Perhaps one day an Irishman will bring the whole rich and absorbing story to light.'[82]

John McCormick's *Victorian Marionette Theatre* illustrates the many connections between the most successful puppet theatres of the period, often from common origins or having developed with the benefit of expertise provided by common employees. The shared touring circuits within Britain and Ireland meant that performers, productions, and innovations were as likely to have had Irish influence as not – despite the acknowledgment of any particular puppet troupe as a British phenomenon.[83] This interconnectivity between touring marionette

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[80] Gunter Böhmer, *Puppets Through the Ages: an illustrated history* (London, 1969), p. 7.

[81] Jurkowski & Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*; Jurkowski & Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: The Twentieth Century*.

[82] Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, p. 127.

[83] McCormick et al., *The Victorian Marionette Theatre*.

companies is further detailed in *A Survey of Victorian Marionettists* by John Phillips and in an article about the origins of *Bullock's Royal Marionettes*.[84]

A comparative study of nineteenth century popular puppet theatre in Europe illustrates the continued tendency of touring popular entertainments to include British and Irish venues within a typical touring circuit. The study mentions only two indigenous Irish puppet companies (both multi-generation family businesses) from this period. The Cullen family provided a century of Punch & Judy performances at Irish fairgrounds across four generations from the 1830s. The Lambert family straddled the 1950s cabaret scene with twenty years of Irish television performances from the 1960s, as well as hosting audiences in their own theatre at Monkstown Co Dublin from 1972 until it closed in 2018.[85]

McCormick's account of the Holden family as 'giants in the world of the Victorian marionette theatre' details the extent to which England became noted for its great marionette companies in the later nineteenth century.[86] This work also demonstrates Holdens' shared origins with the other famous puppet companies of the time, including those of the Bullock, Middleton and Springthorpe families – each of whom had varying roots with D'Arc's Marionettes, a famous puppet company established in Dublin in the 1870s.[87]

A journal article by John Phillips details the establishment of D'Arc's Marionettes by a French waxworks proprietor while exhibiting in Dublin over a period of six years from 1868 to 1874. Philips recounts the combination of expertise of sculpting, performance and manipulation by French, English and Irish artists, technicians and performers that went to establish one of the most successful international puppet troupes that ever performed for such a global audience.[88]

1.5.4 Puppet Theatre in Irish Histories

Despite the absence of a published comprehensive history of the Irish puppet theatre, there have been many references to puppet theatre performances within histories of Irish theatre and popular culture.

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[84] John Phillips, 'A Survey of Victorian Marionettists' in James Fisher (ed.), *The Puppetry Yearbook* (Lewiston, NY, 1997), iii, 139–178; John Phillips, 'The Origin and Progress of W.J. Bullock's Royal Marionettes' in James Fisher (ed.), *The Puppetry Yearbook* (Lewiston, NY, 1996), ii, 143–163.

[85] McCormick & Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*.

[86] John McCormick, *The Holdens: Monarchs of the Marionette Theatre* (London, 2018), p. 165.

[87] McCormick, *The Holdens: Monarchs of the Marionette Theatre*.

[88] Phillips, 'D'Arcs in Dublin'.

Alan Fletcher records the first known extant record of puppetry in Ireland as a reference to visiting, or strolling, players on 16 July 1635 within the household accounts of Viscount Dungarvan: 'Given i6˚ [six pence] by your Lordship's direccon [direction] to the poppit players, x.s.'[89] Fletcher also makes reference to an earlier allusion to "a puppet play in Dublin, possibly in the summer of 1611".[90]

Puppet shows feature within the leisure of wealthy eighteenth century Dublin families in Toby Barnard's *Making the Grand Figure: Lives and Possessions in Ireland 1641-1770*: 'They relaxed at inns and the bagnio, listened to concerts and plays, bought books, clothes, furniture and the services of doctors, tutors and lawyers. They paid to watch shows – of puppets, waxworks, automata and paintings.'[91]

In the most recent comprehensive account of Irish theatre history, Christopher Morash makes no specific mention of the puppet stage. He does, however, outline in great detail, the environment in which puppet theatres would have performed in Ireland. This includes details of the touring routes of many of the theatre companies in the eighteenth century. 'The geography of Irish theatre began to take form in the decade after 1735, when rival Dublin companies travelled south and north respectively during the summer season, establishing theatre cultures along an axis that ran from Belfast to Cork, with Dublin at its centre.'[92]

The use of the puppet theatre for operatic performance in Ireland is mentioned within historical accounts of music performance. *A Dublin Musical Calendar 1700-1760* by Brian Boydell presents a chronology of music-related performances in Dublin for the first sixty years of the eighteenth century. Amongst the entries are several references to 'Mr Stretch's Diversion in Capel Street" where it is noted that, on 7th January 1742, the puppet theatre featured 'The Health Restoring Eagle… to which will be added a new Operatical Farce call'd Punch's Courtship and Wedding.'[93]

T. J. Walsh also mentions Stretch's puppet theatre as he corrects an earlier assertion about its exact location in Capel Street in the preface of *Opera in Dublin 1798-1820*: 'I may have erred in

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[89] Alan J. Fletcher, *Drama, Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork, 2000), p. 425.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Toby Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure: Lives and Possessions in Ireland, 1641-1770* (New Haven, 2004), p. 308.

[92] Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 44.

[93] Brian Boydell, *A Dublin Musical Calendar 1700-1760* (Dublin, 1988), p. 76.

recording that Dawson and Mahon had taken over Stretch's puppet theatre in Capel Street in 1770, instead of the theatre founded by the Smock Alley players in 1744/45.'[94]

The only reference to puppet theatre in Peter Kavanagh's *The Irish Theatre* is his identification, quoting from O'Keeffe's *Recollections,* of the building which once housed one of Dublin's most famous puppet theatres. 'In 1770, however, the lull in Dublin theatrical affairs was broken by a Mr William Dawson who took a lease on "the little theatre in Capel Street" which had been 'built by a man of the name of Stretche to exhibit his puppet show and was called Stretche's Show."'[95]

Stretch is also mentioned by Rev. S. C. Hughes in *The Pre-Victorian Drama in Dublin* and is the only publication of the period to identify the puppeteer's full name. Referring to William Dawson having opened a theatre in Capel Street in 1770, Hughes writes that 'Randal Stretch had used the premises for many years as a puppet-show; and as the puppets did not require a green room but simply hung with their faces on the wall, the back parlour of an adjacent shop was hired.'[96]

From a popular entertainment perspective, J. T. Gilbert's *A History of the City of Dublin* includes a passing reference to puppet shows in his colourful description of Dublin popular entertainment in 1818 by quoting 'a well-informed author of the day, with much truth' as writing*:* 'There is no stimulus for principal actors to engage in Dublin, where the public would rather encourage a company of Indian jugglers, an Italian puppet-show, or the burlesque pantomime of a company of monkey rope-dancers and French dogs.'[97]

Historical accounts of the puppet theatre are not confined to books. An 1892 painting by Irish artist, Richard Thomas Moynan, entitled *A Travelling Show,* features a travelling puppet show performing in the street for some well-dressed children, while poorer children in rags join the paying audience. The painting includes an accompanying drummer, known as the *Bottler*, whose role was to drum up business by attracting attention for the puppet booth.[98]

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[94] T. J. Walsh, *Opera in Dublin 1798-1820* (Oxford & New York, 1993), p. 4.

[95] Peter Kavanagh, *The Irish Theatre: Being a history of the drama in Ireland from the earliest period to the present day* (Tralee, 1946), p. 281.

[96] Rev S. C. Hughes, *The Pre-Victorian Drama in Dublin* (Research & Source Works Series: Theatre and Drama Series, New York, 1970), p. 19.

[97] J. T. Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin* (Dublin, 1859), p. 245.

[98] A 2006 exhibition in the National Gallery of Ireland, *A time and a place: Two Centuries of Irish Social Life* featured the painting and was described in an accompanying publication. Brendan Rooney, *A time and a place: Two Centuries of Irish Social Life* (Dublin, 2006), pp 89–90.

It is in the context of another historical musical reference, in an article entitled *The Woffingtons of Dublin*, that theatre historian W. J. Lawrence refers to puppeteer Spencer Woffington. The performer is described by Lawrence as 'the proprietor of a curious Dublin puppet show known as *The Patagonian Theatre*' that performed parodies of opera and burlesque pieces in second half of the eighteenth century before moving to London.[99]

W. J. Lawrence can be credited with having written most about the history of the puppet theatre in Ireland. Lawrence's importance, in chronicling so much of Irish theatre history of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries has been acknowledged in many quarters. 'It has been truly said that to whatever aspect of theatre history the student may turn, Lawrence will have been there before him.'[100] Given Lawrence's standing as a theatre historian, his references to historical puppet performances are of particular significance. Lawrence published much of his material within the popular press as he earned a living as a journalist in the early part of the twentieth century.

In a 1905 *Weekly Irish Times* article about Dean Swift's connection with the Dublin stage, Lawrence highlighted the rivalry between eighteenth century Dublin theatres and the unusually significant competition for audiences provided by Randal Stretch's Capel Street puppet theatre. The article attributes authorship of *Punch's Petition to the Ladies* to Swift in which the Dean supports the puppet master's plea to the Lord Mayor not to be subject to licence as life-sized theatres were.[101] In a similar article in *The Irish Independent* later that month, Lawrence opines that although Dean Swift was not a lover of the theatre, 'he did not consider Punch and Judy among forbidden relaxations' and that Swift ' had been a keen observer of Strich's marionettes'.[102]

Lawrence published several other articles throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century about Dublin's puppet theatres based on material he gleaned from newspaper archives and official documents. He described how the puppets successfully redeployed much of the tried-and-tested fare of the human stage and how their proprietors' engagement with the newspapers of the day was as effective as that employed by theatre managers. The details that

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[99] William J. Lawrence, 'The Woffingtons of Dublin' in *Musical Antiquity*, no. July 1912 (1912), p. 218.
[100] Bertram Shuttleworth, 'W. J. Lawrence: A Handlist' in *Theatre Notebook*, viii, no. 3 (1954), p. 52.
[101] William J. Lawrence, 'Dean Swift and the Dublin Stage' in *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin, 5 Aug. 1905).
[102] William J. Lawrence, 'A Famous Dublin Show' in *Irish Independent* (Dublin, 29 Aug. 1905).

Lawrence provided indicate that eighteenth century puppet theatres were, in terms of cost, content and popularity, often regarded as an equivalent of the mainstream theatres.[103]

1.5.5 Theatrical Biographies

Biographies of actors, travelling showmen and impresarios often provide detailed accounts of puppet theatre venues and performances as well as the success of performances or companies. Unfortunately, the accuracy of the detail of many of the older biographies must be questioned as personal memories have been shown to be unreliable in the level of detail. Nonetheless, there is much useful material here and provides a vivid depiction of the environment in which these men and women worked.

The popularity of puppet theatre over mainstream theatre in the 1740s is also noted in Esther Sheldon's biography of Thomas Sheridan, when Randal Stretch's marionettes provided Smock Alley with some serious competition. 'The regular stage in Dublin was dwindling away, while Stretch's puppet show, its only serious rival, prospered.'[104]

One of the earliest biographies which gives mention of puppet shows in Ireland is that of Michael Kelly's *Reminiscences*, published in 1826, in which the Irish tenor, composer, theatre manager, and music publisher describes his leisure time while attending 'the best academy in Dublin' in the 1770s. He recalls that 'Kane O'Hara, the ingenious author of Midas, had a puppet-show for the amusement of his friends' and described it as 'quite the rage with all the people of fashion, who crowded nightly to see the gratuitous performance'.[105] W. J. Lawrence identifies this puppet theatre as The Patagonian Theatre on Dublin's Abbey Street, but corrected that 'the real manager of the little show was John Ellis'.[106]

John O'Keeffe's *Recollections*, also published in 1826, includes one of the earliest first-hand descriptions of Stretch's puppet theatre in Dublin's Capel Street and included a description of a repartee between the proprietor and Mr Punch. The actor's biography recorded the origins of

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[103] These articles were published in a variety of newspapers and periodicals between 1905 and 1925, including: William J. Lawrence, 'Some Old Dublin Side Shows' in *Saturday Herald* (Dublin, 11 July 1908); William J. Lawrence, 'Some Old Dublin Puppet Shows' in *The Mail* (Dublin, 17 Oct. 1908); William J. Lawrence, 'Some Old Dublin Puppet Shows' in *Irish Rosary*, 1919, pp 425–431; William J. Lawrence, 'Early Irish Ballad Opera and Comic Opera' in *Musical Quarterly*, viii, no. 3 (1922), pp 397–412; William J. Lawrence, 'Marionette Operas' in *Musical Quarterly*, x, no. 2 (1924), pp 236–243.

[104] Esther K. Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan of Smock-Alley, 1719-1788* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1967), p. 54.

[105] Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences* (London, 1826), p. 3.

[106] Lawrence, 'Marionette Operas', p. 239.

a Dublin expression, based on Stretch's show. '…which produced a bye-saying to any thing that was absurd and nonsensical – 'Oh, this is more of Stretch's Show!'[107]

Biographies of visiting puppeteers provide some insight into the life of a travelling showman who contributed to Irish puppet theatre. In *The Life and Travels of Richard Barnard, Marionette Proprietor*, Barnard describes his Irish tour in 1872 with the Springthorpe Marionette troupe when he performed in Newry, Dundalk and Drogheda, lamenting that 'the business was very bad at all three towns'. Barnard's avoidance of Dublin performances may be explained by his mention of D'Arc's marionette theatre who were then drawing large audiences at Dublin's Rotunda Rooms.[108]

Part of the transition of puppetry to an Irish television audience is documented in George Boyle's biography, in which he recounts his life as a part-time ventriloquist in the 1950s and 1960s. This includes an account of his performance as the first puppeteer on Irish television, when his Irish language ventriloquism act was broadcast immediately following President de Valera's address on the first night transmission of Telefís Éireann 31 December 1961.[109]

1.5.6 Entertainment and Theatrical Newspapers

The trade press of the theatrical and entertainment professions provides contemporaneous accounts of the work and lifestyle of those who made a living from puppetry, including material gleaned from trade advertisements.

The Era newspaper was published weekly in London from 1838 to 1939, during most of which time it specialised in theatrical content. Articles included reports of puppet performances in Ireland, both from local and visiting puppet theatres. Aside from the editorial content, *The Era*'s advertisements provide a rich source of information relating to the business of Irish and British entertainers, including the puppet theatre.

The World's Fair, a newspaper of the British fairground and related industries, was published for over a century from 1904. While the editorial and advertising content recorded much of the life and affairs of twentieth century popular entertainers, it also published a puppetry-related column, *Punch & Puppetry Pars,* for many years from 1938. Edited by Gerald Morice, the column made occasional references to Irish puppet activities, including recounting the memories of British performers who had spent time in Ireland. Gerald Morice, using his middle

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[107] John O'Keeffe, *Recollections of the Life of John O'Keeffe* (London, 1826), pp 165–166.

[108] Richard Barnard, *The Life and Travels of Richard Barnard, Marionette Proprietor* (London, 1981), p. 29.

[109] George Boyle, *I Must be Talking to Myself!* (Dublin, 2003).

names of Charles Trentham, later wrote a semi-regular column on puppetry in the theatrical newspaper, *The Stage and Television Today*.

Puppetry was an annual publication published by the *Puppeteers of America* from 1936 to 1947. It recorded international puppetry news for each year. Mentions of activity in Ireland include visiting puppet companies, such as the account of a tour of northwest Ireland by English puppeteer Frank Worth in 1938 in which he describes his various audiences in great detail.[110] The publication later details the development of the *Dublin Marionette Group* under the leadership of Nelson Paine in 1940s Dublin.[111]

Although varied and plentiful, historical references to the puppet theatre and puppet performances in Ireland have been almost always written in the context of another topic: a venue, a production or a performer. Articles dedicated to the history of the puppet theatre have been rare, quite short and typically focused on a very specific topic. There is no single substantial work that considers the nature and impact of the puppet theatre in Ireland over any significant period. Given the many references to the puppet theatre in Ireland across other national histories, within Irish histories of related subjects, within specialist publications on aspects of puppetry, and within the entertainment and theatre trade press, there is undoubtedly a gap to be filled by a history of the puppet theatre in Ireland.

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Research Objectives and Design

The purpose of this work is to address '…the mistaken assumption that there was no history of puppetry in Ireland before the second half of the twentieth century.'[112] This dissertation seeks to challenge that assumption by uncovering the significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland, as an art form, performance type or form of theatre. In highlighting the significant influence of the puppet theatre in Ireland, it will also be demonstrated that it has shaped and influenced the development and practice of the puppet theatre across Europe and beyond.

This research sought to answer the question: Has the puppet theatre been a significant form of professional entertainment, performance or theatrical production in Ireland?

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[110] Frank Worth, 'My Puppets in Ireland' in *Puppetry - An International Yearbook of Puppets & Marionettes*, ix (1938), pp 20–21.

[111] Paul McPharlin, 'International News Notes: EIRE' in *Puppetry - An International Yearbook of Puppets & Marionettes*, xiii–xiv (1942), p. 36; Paul McPharlin, 'International News Notes: EIRE' in *Puppetry - An International Yearbook of Puppets & Marionettes*, xv (1944), p. 36.

[112] McCormick, 'Lambert Theatre and Puppetry Redefined', p. 287.

…and to expand on this question by addressing these sub-questions:

- What impact have individual practitioners had on the puppet theatre as an art form or performance genre in Ireland?
- What impact has Irish puppetry had on puppet performance internationally?
- How has puppet theatre in Ireland adapted to technological opportunities and challenges?

Demonstrating the significance of historical puppet theatre performance in Ireland might be achieved by a quantitative approach in analysing archival records. One option might be to measure the number of puppet performances at Irish venues, the number of puppet companies or consideration of the presence of trade advertising for puppeteers and allied professions.

As Alan Bryman points out, such a statistical analysis would primarily be useful in providing a generalised understanding that could be applied to a wider instance.[113] However, this is not the intention of this research, which is more concerned with achieving a contextual understanding of the development of the puppet theatre in Ireland.

Achieving that contextual understanding would also be limited in the use of other quantitative methods in that they are most effecting in providing a snapshot in time. As Yilmaz has pointed out, quantitative research assumes a static reality, placing an emphasis on the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables.[114] Such a static perspective cannot illustrate the process employed and is limited in providing an understanding of how and why a puppet theatre performed and developed as it did.

On the other hand, as observed by Rwegshora, qualitative approaches lend themselves to illustrating the unfolding of events over time and to revealing the interconnections between participants.[115] To understand the historical nature and impact of the puppet theatre in Ireland, one has to consider the context in which such performances took place. As noted by Hennick et al, qualitative research can 'identify social, cultural, economic or physical context in which activities take place'.[116] Nicholson has pointed to specific applications of a qualitative

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[113] Alan Bryman, *Social research methods* (3rd ed., Oxford, 2008), p. 156.

[114] Kaya Yilmaz, 'Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences' in *European Journal of Education*, xlviii, no. 2 (2013), p. 312.

[115] Hossea M. Rwegoshora, *A Guide to Social Science Research* (2016), p. 132.

[116] Monique M. Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative research methods* (Los Angeles ;, 2011), p. 10.

approach: 'Qualitative readings of Victorian culture have provided countless new insights into the ideas that shaped the period.'[117]

For this work, therefore, a qualitative method of research is most appropriate, where examples of the puppet theatre in Ireland can be considered in detail, recognising the context in which they occurred and highlighting their particular relevance to one or more of the research questions.

1.6.2 Historical Research

Historical research and analysis pose particular challenges for the researcher, when compared to research within social science or the natural sciences. McDowell notes that 'historians sometimes have to make sense of past events from the varied and often unorganised material left behind by previous generations.'[118] This is not a working environment in which scientific researchers would find themselves. In that regard, Hayden has noted that 'as a discourse about things no longer perceivable, historiography must *construct*, by which I mean imagine and conceptualize, its objects of interest before it can proceed to bring to bear upon them the kinds of procedures it wishes to use to 'explain' or 'understand' them. [119]

The use of narrative history or storytelling is acknowledged as a valid and effective means of research or mode of analysis. Green and Troup regard narrative as being 'central to the explanation of change over time' and is 'one of the most important dimensions of historical research and writing'.[120] Hackett Fisher used the term 'braided narrative' to describe the interweaving of description and analysis,[121] while Burke contends that narrative and analysis should be deliberately integrated in historical narrative.[122]

1.6.3 Case Study Methodology and Selection

Rather than present a chronological account of the history and development of the theatre in Ireland, this work offers detailed case studies of four puppeteer impresarios whose

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[117] Bob Nicholson, 'Counting Culture; or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance' in *Journal of Victorian Culture: JVC*, xvii, no. 2 (2012), p. 238.

[118] W. H. McDowell, *Historical Research: A Guide for Writers of Dissertations, Theses, Articles and Books* (Oxon, England, 2013), p. 11.

[119] Hayden White, 'An Old Question Raised Again: Is Historiography Art or Science? (Response to Iggers)' in *Rethinking History*, iv, no. 3 (2000), pp 391–406.

[120] Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The houses of history: A critical reader in history and theory* (2nd ed., Manchester, 2016), pp 232–235.

[121] David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's seed: four British folkways in America* (Oxford & New York, 1991), p. xi.

[122] Peter Burke, 'History of events and the revival of narrative' in Peter Burke (ed.), *History of events and the revival of narrative* (Cambridge), pp 233–248.

professional lives demonstrated the significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland across three centuries. These case studies also demonstrate the broader significance of the Irish puppet theatre and the extent to which the puppet theatre in Ireland was part of the wider practice of this form of theatre.

The research questions for this study are to be answered by considering how and why the puppet theatre was performed and developed in Ireland. According to Yin, responding to the how and why of a research topic is an ideal purpose to which qualitative research and specifically a case study approach should be applied.[123]

Case studies provide an exploratory approach which, according to Streb, is characterised by the absence of preliminary propositions and hypotheses, because 'identifying these is very often the actual purpose of the study instead of being the origin'.[124] Such an approach is suited to the purposes of this research, which is to establish if there has been a significant history of the puppet theatre in Ireland. Yin's contention that the exploratory case study serves as 'a prelude to much social research' in so far as it is used to generate questions for future research, is also suited to this purpose.[125]

In defining case study methodology, Gerring underlines its primary advantage over other qualitative methods: 'An intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units'.[126] It is in our consideration of the specific that we can shed light on and achieve an understanding of the general. Analysing the work of any particular puppet theatre impresario should illustrate their role within the practice of puppetry in Ireland and how their work impacted on the puppet theatre internationally.

Gerring separately defined a case as 'a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time'[127], which underlines the notion that the use of a case study approach provides a snapshot in time. This suggests a limitation on the extent to which the use of a case study allows one to extrapolate from the specific to the general.

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[123] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed., Los Angeles, 2018).

[124] Christoph Streb, 'Exploratory Case Study' in *Encyclopaedia of Case Study Research* (2009), p. 372.

[125] Robert K. Yin, *Applications of case study research* (3rd ed., Los Angeles, 2012), p. 29.

[126] John Gerring, 'What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?' in *American Political Science Review*, xcviii, no. 2 (2004), p. 342.

[127] John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices.* (Strategies for social inquiry, Second edition., Cambridge, 2016), p. 19.

Another limitation of this methodology that has been suggested is that its proper use must allow for the impact of context and external factors on the chosen case. Rwegoshora defines a case study as 'an intensive analysis of an individual unit (e.g. a person, group or event) stressing developmental factors in relation to context', emphasising the need to consider the context in which the case study is to be examined.[128] This has relevance to this particular research as Irish historical puppet theatre performance took place within specific contexts of political, social and theatrical developments and must be considered within such contexts.

Flyvbjerg has pointed to the criticism of case study methodology in terms of the reliability of extrapolating from the specific to the general.[129] However, Thomas argues that extrapolating from the specific to the general is an issue for much research within the social sciences: 'to argue that to seek *generalizable knowledge*, in whatever form – everyday or special – is to miss the point about what may be offered by certain kinds of inquiry, which is *exemplary knowledge*'.[130] Yin also defends the generalisation aspect of case study research by underlining that the researcher is generalising from the case study, rather than from the case itself.[131]

As observed by Quinn Patton, a hallmark of a case studies methodology is the use of multiple data sources, which is the case in this instance.[132] While the sources employed were archival, they varied to include a variety of archival sources, including newspaper articles, theatre archives, audio recordings, hospital administration files and court and prison records. The use of such a range of sources allows for confirmation and validation of information as well as guiding the researcher in the interpretation of individual archival sources.

Each of the four cases studied for this work represents two aspects of the purpose of this research. From one perspective, each case demonstrates that there was significant presence of puppet theatre in Ireland throughout the period under consideration. From another perspective, each case highlights a different way in which the puppet theatre can act as a form of entertainment, performance, and theatre. It is this aspect that binds each of these four cases together: puppet theatre as an art form. While the four cases occur across a span of time, they also take place in different contexts, but are used in quite different ways.

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[128] Rwegoshora, *A Guide to Social Science Research*, p. 139.

[129] Bent Flyvbjerg, 'Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research' in *Qualitative Inquiry*, xii, no. 2 (2006), pp 219–245.

[130] Gary Thomas, 'The case: generalisation, theory and phronesis in case study' in *Oxford Review of Education*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2011), p. 33.

[131] Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, p. 38.

[132] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed., London, 2002).

The selection of the chosen four cases was prompted by a number of factors. The first of these was a need to represent different periods from the known history of the puppet theatre in Ireland. Individual references to the puppet theatre in Ireland in existing histories dated from the early part of the seventeenth century. Alan Fletcher identifies two of the earliest extant references to puppet performances in Ireland, one of which is an allusion to 'a puppet play in Dublin, possibly in the summer of 1611'. Fletcher makes a more specific reference to an entry in the household accounts of Viscount Dungarvan, recording payment to some strolling players on 16th July 1635: 'Given i6˚ [six pence] by your Lordship's direccon [direction] to the poppit players, x.s.'[133]

However, creating a meaningful case study in each instance required access to a critical mass of archival material relating to the chosen subject. A reliance on such material provides a starting point of the early eighteenth century, providing one with a period of 300 years in which to consider the impact and influence of the puppet theatre in Ireland.

While the availability of a critical mass of material about any one case was important in the selection of cases, another consideration was identifying a distinguishing aspect to each case. Each of the chosen four cases highlighted a significant aspect of the way the puppet theatre operated in Ireland and made a particular contribution to the practice of puppet theatre in the wider world. The selection of the Randal Stretch topic illustrated the extent to which his puppet theatre became the centre of the satirical and political commentary of the day. The Lambert D'Arc case provided a unique insight into the way puppet theatre showmen and impresarios were part of the Victorian popular entertainment landscape. Nelson Paine's work with the Dublin Marionette Group and the Puppet Opera Company highlighted the extent to which puppet theatre could be regarded as mainstream theatre, rather than as a form of popular entertainment and how experimental theatre practice could be realised through the puppet theatre. The case of Eugene Lambert's involvement with the Irish television service illustrated the ability of puppet theatre to adapt to new forms of performance and communication and the extent to which significant innovation in early children's television happened in Ireland well before it had internationally.

1.6.4 Archival Research

Using archival sources can provide a rich and diverse range of information that could not otherwise be identified or interpreted. Their importance in providing an understanding of past events, decisions and outcomes is increasingly acknowledged. King refers to archival research

[133] Fletcher, *Drama, Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland*, p. 425.

as 'the bread and butter' of the professional existence of many modern historians.[134] Nora describes archives as the guardians of the memories of modern societies, which are increasingly dependent upon them.[135] Steedman refers to the archive as 'a record of the past at the same time as it points to the future'.[136]

Despite the importance of archival research to the historian, it must be remembered that it is not the archival material itself that forms the historical research, but the interpretation by the historian on such material. Davis has observed that 'it is very difficult – perhaps impossible – to write history in which some form of speculation or imagination does not occur, either in making connections between sources or in assessing new evidence that has been unearthed or in filling in the gaps when evidence is unavailable.'[137]

The digitisation of newspapers, journals and magazines has created an important asset for social historians, with many benefits of accessibility, searching and convenience. Gale and Featherstone have underlined the potential of analytical tools provided by the digitisation of what was originally created in hard copy: 'the micro- analysis that digitisation enables makes it possible to expand the thickness of print journalism and take it down to the level of the word, even the letter.'[138]

Bingham points out that while the digitization of newspapers has provided many obvious benefits to researchers, one must remain aware of the potential problems and difficulties in using digitised historical newspapers for research purposes. Not least amongst these is the selection of particular titles may only be because of their availability in digital form, as against other titles that remain only in print - despite perhaps being more representative of the chosen research topic.[139]

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[134] Michelle T. King, 'Working With/In the Archives' in *Research Methods for History* (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities, Edinburgh, 2012), p. 13.

[135] Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past. English language edition edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman ; translated by Arthur Goldhammer.* (New York, 1996), p. 8.

[136] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust / Carolyn Steedman.* (Encounters, Manchester, 2001), p. 7.

[137] Jim Davis, Katie Normington, Gilli Bush-Bailey and Jacky Bratton, 'Researching Theatre History and Historiography' in *Research methods in theatre and performance* (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities, Edinburgh, 2011), p. 92.

[138] Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone, 'The Imperative of the Archive: Creative Archive Research' in *Research methods in theatre and performance / Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson* (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities, Edinburgh, 2011), p. 34.

[139] Adrian Bingham, 'The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians' in *Twentieth Century British History*, xxi, no. 2 (2010), p. 229.

Brake echoes this caution, pointing out that researchers accessing digital sources are, in the first instance, limiting their sources to that which has been digitised – pointing out that the reasons that particular newspaper titles or issues may have little to do with their importance or accuracy.[140]

Archival sources beyond digital publications are also particularly useful in the consideration of any history of theatre and performance. Theatrical playbills and advertising materials provide information about the participants, the performance and the place, but, as Bratton points out, such sources are often 'a very unimaginatively used resource' because they have the potential to being far more than 'a simple source of extractable factual information'.[141] Featherstone describes an enhanced approach to such archival sources as providing information about questions such as 'how this material was interpreted, adapted and managed for performance'.[142]

1.6.5 Sources Consulted

The archival research for this study drew upon a diverse range of archives in Ireland, Britain, and the United States. These were mainly consulted in their original form by the author – some of which were, or have since been, digitised. Sinn and Soares have reported an increasing number of historical researchers preferring digital archives, rather than accessing the original material. However, they also found a remaining perception amongst historical researchers of an inherent value in accessing original sources, quoting one of their respondents to contend that 'seeing, smelling, touching the documents, objects and places that our historical subjects knew provides crucial insights that digital documents cannot'.[143]

Theatre archives were not particularly fruitful sources of material relating to the puppet theatre for this study. However, a small number of specific questions were answered by reference to material from within the *Irish Theatre Archive* at Pearse Street Library (Dublin), the *Theatre & Performing Arts* collection at the Linen Hall Library (Belfast) and The *Abbey Theatre Archives*, the latter of which covers material relating to both the Abbey and Peacock theatres.

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[140] Laurel Brake, 'Half Full and Half Empty' in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, xvii, no. 2 (2012), pp 222–229.

[141] Bratton, *New readings in theatre history*, p. 39.

[142] Ann Featherstone, 'Documents of Performance: Reading between the Lines: A Library and a Portable Theatre' in *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, xxx, no. 2 (2003), p. 70.

[143] Donghee Sinn and Nicholas Soares, 'Historians' use of digital archival collections: The web, historical scholarship, and archival research' in *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, lxv, no. 9 (2014), p. 1806.

The collection of 99 notebooks of theatre historian W. J. Lawrence, *Annals of the Dublin Stage*, covering Dublin theatrical and entertainment matters from 1637 to 1905, are held by the University of Cincinnati Archives and Rare Books Library. Consulting this archive was very useful in providing a performance context of particular periods and, in some instances, providing specific information or a perspective on an aspect of the puppet theatre. Cross-referencing these notebooks with annotations made by Lawrence on his published work within the collection of *W. J. Lawrence's Work: Personal Scrapbooks* held by the National Library of Ireland corrected or clarified some material within the notebooks. Consideration of both archives was supplemented by the content of letters written by Lawrence to Joseph Holloway, which form part of the *Holloway Papers* held by the National Library of Ireland. Further letters and notebooks by Lawrence, held within the Bristol Theatre Collection at the University of Bristol and within the Townsend Walsh Papers at the New York Public Library, were less helpful.

The physical newspaper archives – and those of the *RTV Guide* and *RTE Guide* - at Marsh's Library, the National Library of Ireland and the British Library proved very useful during the early part of the research for this study. Over time, the digitisation of newspaper archives made available online via *The British Newspaper Archive* and the *Irish News Archive* proved useful resources. It is interesting to note that in several instances, information identified from the physical archives were not later returned in searches of the digital archives.

Information about the physical location of performance venues and some aspects of the financial affairs of the proprietors of puppetry enterprises were useful in providing a context for some of the case studies, as well as clarifying specific queries in some instances. The Registry of Deeds houses copies of memorials from of the transfer of properties and some other financial transactions. This information is recorded within the *Transcript Books*, dating from 1708 and the *Abstract Books*, dating from 1803, with indices available for both. However, as these resources were not designed for the purpose of research such as this, identifying the relevant information was challenging at times. Registry of Deeds indices are recorded under the name of the Grantor, identifying the Grantee within the entry. This posed a difficulty in searching for the name of a theatre proprietor who would have leased a premises where the exact location was unclear, as the proprietor would be the Grantee in such memorials.[144]

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[144] For example, the only definitive means of checking the index for a possible lease by eighteenth century puppet theatre proprietor, Randal Stretch, was to search every entry in the Grantors index from 1708 to 1745, comprising entries in 40 volumes, totalling 124,160 entries in the index, which took the author most of two weeks, but proved fruitful.

Trade publications for the theatrical and entertainment professions provided a great deal of useful material. This included trade news articles and advertisements for personnel or equipment within the pages of *The Era* from the *Burney Collection of Newspapers* at the British Library or from the archives of the *World's Fair* newspaper held within the *National Fairground Archive* at the University of Sheffield.

Specific puppetry-related archival material was accessed within the archives of the *Puppet Centre Trust* and the *British Puppet & Model Theatre Guild (BPMTG)* held at the library of the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London; archived publications of the *BPMTG* and of *British UNIMA* (*Union Internationale de la Marionette)* held by the British Library; and at the *Theatre and Performance c*ollection at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The *World's Fair* newspaper held within the *National Fairground Archive* at the University of Sheffield included a weekly column, *Punch & Puppetry Pars*, specifically for professional puppeteers.

Given the familial connections within puppet companies, sources of genealogical information were very useful. Sources used included the physical archives of *Births, Deaths and Marriages* at the General Register Office at Werburgh Street and the *Baptism, Marriage and Burial* records at the Church of Ireland Representative Church Library (RCB) Library in Churchtown. Digitised genealogical records accessed through subscriptions to *Ancestry* and *MyHeritage* allowed for the creation of family trees to trace the impact of relevant familial connections. These were supplemented with material from the digitised official records provided by the *Irish Genealogy* web site.

The National Archives of Ireland provided useful genealogical, legal and financial archival information within their archive of *Testamentary Records*. This source is particularly useful in light of the many records destroyed in the Public Record Office during the Civil War in 1922. NAI tools and guides such as *Vicar's Index to Wills* and *Betham's Abstracts* helped to bridge gaps in the records. Archived Department of Justice files relating to *Citizenship and Naturalisation* were also very useful – particularly for one of the case studies. The nineteenth-century Minutes of the Hospital Board within the *Archives of the Rotunda Hospital* provided an answer to a long-standing puzzle relating to the sudden departure from Dublin by one of most successful entertainers.

Incidental archival sources such as the *Manchester Prison Records* and the *Greater Manchester Rate Books* held by Manchester City Council provided sources of single pieces of information, but proved useful in providing clarity or in explaining how a situation came about.

In addition to these archival sources, use was also made of a series of audio interviews with Eugene Lambert, which were recorded in October 2009.

1.6.6 Ethical Considerations and Publisher Permissions

Access to the archival materials used in the research for this work was made with the permission of the owners of the materials in accordance with their requirements and those of the library or archival repository. The research for this dissertation did not require interaction with human subjects, so no considerations had to be made in that regard.

This is confirmation that approval has been provided by the editor / publisher of each of the four journal articles for their inclusion within this PhD by publication and the uploading of the completed dissertation to DORAS, the open access institutional repository at Dublin City University.

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge

The research indicates that the art of puppetry should be viewed as having an equal standing with other art forms, not just as a form of artistic practice, but as a central, though often unacknowledged, element of Irish cultural history. It finds that the art form was accessible to a variety of distinctive audiences, cutting across political, class, gender and other divides. The research also finds that a key feature of puppetry as an art form in Ireland was its practitioners' capacity to adapt to technological opportunities and challenges. This willingness to engage with innovations such as railways, print, radio and television contributed to the artistic exchange and dissemination of ideas and practices and demonstrated the versatility the puppeteers. Overall, the research clearly demonstrates that there is a strong need for cultural historians to re-think how performance histories in Ireland are conceptualised in terms of the contribution that puppetry has made to artistic and cultural life nationally and internationally.

Chapter 2: Satirist, Puppeteer and Publicist, Randal Stretch (unknown-1746)

2.1 Introduction

This journal article details a particularly successful eighteenth-century marionette theatre on Dublin's Capel Street, which was referenced by writers and commentators over the following decades. The article demonstrates that, contrary to a common perception, puppetry had a significant presence within Ireland's history of entertainment, performance, and theatre and that in such instances it was often regarded as an equal form of expression alongside conventional performances.

Because puppet performances are so often associated with children's audiences, the potential for the art form to make a significant impact is often either not considered or is grossly understated. This case study illustrates the extent to which an Irish puppet theatre did make an impact with adult audiences, even to the extent that it challenged the popularity and success of mainstream theatre with adult audiences.

Stretch's theatre was a point of some discussion by Dean Swift and his circle, which demonstrates the equal regard this art form was given by the cultural elite of the period. Such commentary equated the impact of Stretch's puppets with those of the leading human actors of eighteenth-century Dublin. Consideration of these discussions shows the acceptance of puppet performance as a usual form of expression and entertainment in Ireland during the eighteenth century.

This article also illustrates how well-suited the puppet theatre is to satirical expression and caricature. As discussed in the overall study, the use of puppets in this way can be more effective than satirical human performance as the medium heightens the level of absurdity. Puppets lend themselves more easily to caricature in that they can made to more easily exaggerate physical attributes and mannerisms that are at the source of the caricature of any individual. The medium offers a blend of humour and exaggeration that makes satire more effective, allowing Stretch's characters were able to lampoon influential figures of the day with impunity.

Because the affairs of puppet theatre are generally more ephemeral than human theatrical enterprises, their historical imprint can be far less distinct than that of mainstream theatre. However, Stretch's financial success indicates the scale and impact of his puppet theatre as a business enterprise. The case study illustrates the extent to which puppet performance has been a successful aspect of the Irish theatrical and entertainment world. While it is evident that Dublin, together with other Irish towns and cities, has always been on the touring map of

visiting performance companies, this article shows a locally based puppet theatre, was not only a viable, but a lucrative, business.

The need to resort to legal action in the Chancery Court not only shows the extent of competition felt by mainstream theatre, but also legitimised the extent of the commercial challenge that the marionette theatre posed and publicly acknowledged the seriousness of the competition Stretch provided. This unusually equated puppet theatre performance with that of the human theatre in a public forum.

2.2 'Oh, This Is More of Stretch's Show'

Journal article published in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* in August 2022*:*

'Oh, this is more of Stretch's Show':
Randal Stretch and puppet theatre in Eighteenth Century Ireland.

Randal Stretch was a puppet showman and proprietor of a puppet theatre located in Capel Street, Dublin, from the early eighteenth-century. Stretch's puppet theatre was remarkably successful, due in part to its proprietor's ability to garner publicity and public support. Such was the notoriety of Stretch's Puppet Show in Dublin that the expression 'Oh this is more of Stretch's Show' became a catchphrase to refer to something absurd or unbelievable for many years.[1] During the time that Stretch's theatre was in operation, Dublin provided much of what would be expected of a capital city, including a range of leisure pursuits and entertainments. Dublin's first, purpose-built, theatre opened in 1637 in Werburgh Street, only a few hundred yards from Dublin Castle.[2] The theatre closed four years later with the outbreak of rebellion in 1641, while any possible re-opening was stymied by Puritan-dominated politics that discouraged drama generally and specifically closed London theatres from 1642 to 1660. [3] A new theatre was built in Smock Alley in 1662, under a royal patent granted to John Ogilby, Irish Master of the Revels.[4] Although originally responsible for producing and financing court entertainments, the Master of the Revels later became the official responsible for the issue of

[1] John O'Keeffe, in his autobiography *Recollections*, the actor John O'Keeffe recalls visiting 'Stretch's Show' as a child. However, given the period in which O'Keefe lived in Dublin, it is likely that this catchphrase may have only developed after Stretch had died in 1744. John O'Keeffe, *Recollections of the Life of John O'Keeffe* (London, 1826), p. 165.

[2] La Tourette Stockwell, *Dublin theatres and theatre customs (1637-1820)* (New York, 1968), p. 22.

[3] W. N. Osborough, *The* Irish *Stage: A Legal History* (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press Ltd, 2015), p.4; Gabriel Egan, 'The Closure of the Theatres', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 44 (2014), 103–19.

[4] The regulation of Dublin theatres mirrored that of London, where favoured theatres were licensed by the Crown.

licences to theatres and theatre companies, as well as the censor of plays.[5] The patent issued to Ogilby granted him and his successors, exclusive rights to licence the public performance of all plays in Ireland. As a result, Smock Alley came to dominate the Dublin theatre scene.[6]

David O'Shaughnessy has described playhouses of the time as being 'among the few spaces where people from almost all walks of life could gather together to engage with literary performance and culture'. [7] This seems to have been true of Smock Alley. The venue relied heavily on audiences associated with the viceregal court, but by the end of the seventeenth century, there is evidence to suggest that a greater range of people were attending the theatre.[8] Notably, John Dunton, a seventeenth-century London bookseller and frequent visitor to Ireland, observed, when visiting Dublin in 1698, that 'The Play-house… is free for all Comers, and gives Entertainment as well to the Broom man, as the greatest Peer'.[9]

Smock Alley provided a venue for 'legitimate' theatre in Dublin – a term used to describe performances in theatres owned by proprietors who had been granted a royal patent. These patent theatres were the only venues permitted to play straight drama.[10] While Smock Alley provided a venue for 'legitimate theatre' in Dublin, there was an increasing diversity of other entertainment on offer, including music hall, pantomime, fairground, circus, horse-racing and street entertainment.[11] Across eighteenth-century Europe, puppetry was an important form of illegitimate theatre and popular entertainment.[12] Often puppet shows were presented in

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[5] Osborough, *The Irish Stage*, pp 2–9.

[6] Morash, A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000, p. 13.

[7] David O'Shaughnessy, 'Staging an Irish Enlightenment', in *Ireland, Enlightenment and the English Stage, 1740-1820*, ed. by David O'Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 2. See, too, Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 34; Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (2007), p. 4.

[8] Desmond Slowey, 'The Role and Image of the Ascendancy in the Irish Theatre, 1600-1900' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Dublin City University, 2006), p. 71.

[9] John Dunton, *The Dublin Scuffle Being a Challenge Sent by John Dunton, Citizen of London, to Patrick Campbel, Bookseller in Dublin.* (London: A. Baldwin, 1699), p. 340.

[10] Scholarship around the concept of *legitimate* drama and theatre have extended this beyond the legal distinction, but as 'a category served to confirm the claim of the patent institution to be public guardians of the nation's dramatic heritage and cultural life. ' Jane Moody, '"Fine Word, Legitimate!": Toward a Theatrical History of Romanticism' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, xxxviii, no. 3/4 (1996), pp 223–244. p. 226. See Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840;* and David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). The distinction also impacted on the development of theatre and drama outside Dublin and London – see Frederick Burwick, *British Drama of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[11] David A. Fleming, 'Diversions of the People: Sociability among the Orders of Early Eighteenth-Century Ireland' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, xvii (2002), pp 99–111.

[12] In Italy, puppeteers took advantage of restrictions placed on live actors in Naples during the public mourning for Charles II of Spain in 1701, while in Venice 'both glove-puppet and marionette shows could

portable booths, where the forerunner of today's Punch character could be seen in all his vulgarity. Descriptions of the Punchinello of the time, including references to wires, indicate that the character was often portrayed as a marionette, or string puppet, allowing for more human-like movement than alternative methods, such as glove puppetry.[13] Puppet theatre performances often emulated mainstream theatre, re-telling traditional tales of tragedy, comedy, farce and opera. Of course, the facility that marionettes – full-bodied puppets with jointed legs – provided to exaggerate movement and voice made them a particularly effective medium for comedy and satire.[14]

Marionette operas became a particularly popular entertainment, following the growth of Italian opera on the British and Irish stage during the eighteenth century.[15] Existing stage productions were often re-enacted in puppet theatres but revised to include parts for Punch**.** Punch was a disruptive influence. Often described as 'a profane, lewd jester' and 'the diversion of all the spectators… a roaring, lewd, rakish, empty fellow'.[16] Punch and the puppet theatre were ideally suited for satire, as noted by Helen Burke: 'Punch delighted the puppet-booth audience because he was an agent of disruption, an anarchic figure who thumped his nose at authority figures and made a farce of conventional morality and manners.' [17] Punch often interacted with the proprietor, who was situated in a box to the side of the stage and within the audience. Such a character provided an easy means of satirising authority and public figures of the day. [18]

The first half of the eighteenth century is considered a golden age for the puppet theatre. Theatre historian, George Speaight, regarded this period as the pinnacle of puppetry as a form of theatre: 'Never before or since have the puppets played so effective and so well publicised a part in fashionable society; never before or since have puppet theatres so successfully made themselves the talk of the town'.[19] Some commentators have suggested that the puppet theatre of this period became a significant part of theatre generally. For example, Henry

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be found on all the main piazzas of the city' in the early 1700s. See McCormick, *The Italian Puppet Theater: A History*.

[13] Speaight, *Punch & Judy: a history*.

[14] David A. Brewer, 'Rethinking Fictionality in the Eighteenth-Century Puppet Theatre' in Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager (eds), *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, 2015), pp 174–92.

[15] Minniear, 'Marionette Opera: its history and literature'.

[16] Speaight, *Punch & Judy: a history*, p. 54.

[17] Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theater, 1712-1784* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 171.

[18] Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, p. 104.

[19] Ibid., p. 92.

Jurkowski has suggested that, during this time, 'Puppet theatre in England became an equal partner of other forms of theatre, because of the involvement of highly skilled craftsmen and artists'.[20] While Jurkowski's claim is contentious, it may be said with some confidence that the significance of puppet theatre in England has been underestimated. This could also be said of Ireland. Based on close examination of extant evidence, this article will show that Randal Stretch's puppet theatre became popular for performances that offered satirical and political commentary and came to rival legitimate theatre in this regard. The success of Stretch's theatre demonstrates the impact of puppet theatre at the time and its ability to entertain and engage with audiences.

Early evidence for Stretch's Puppet Theatre

Randal Stretch and his puppet theatre have received very little scholarly attention to date. There is no surviving record of Randal Stretch before 1721, by which time he seems to have already established a reputation for himself as a puppet impresario. Most contemporary accounts refer only to his theatre or to the puppeteer by his surname, varyingly spelling it as 'Stritch' or 'Stretch'. Theatre historian, W. J. Lawrence, finally favoured the latter spelling, having previously used both versions.[21] Establishing the puppeteer's full name is useful in attributing legal documents and commercial transactions to him. Rev. S. C. Hughes identifies the puppeteer by his full name, when discussing another theatre which opened in Capel Street in 1770, noting that 'Randal Stretch had used the premises for many years as a puppet-show; and as the puppets did not require a green room but simply hung with their faces on the wall, the back parlour of an adjacent shop was hired'. [22] This sole reference in secondary literature to Stretch's full name is confirmed by a reference to 'Randall Stretch, of the city, Showman' in extant documents for a mortgage registered in 1736.[23]

The earliest reference to Stretch and his puppets takes the form of a poem, *The Puppet Show*, which appeared in a Dublin broadside and reprinted shortly afterwards in London's *St James's*

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[20] Jurkowski's claim is contentious and seems to be founded in the necessity for some theatre writers, designers and actors to look to puppetry for work because of limited opportunities on foot of the Licensing Act of 1737. Jurkowski & Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: The Twentieth Century*, p. 174.

[21] A handwritten correction by theatre historian W. J. Laurence to an article he published in *The Irish Independent* of 29 August 1903 is included in a personal scrapbook. William J. Lawrence, 'W. J. Lawrence's Work: Personal Scrap Book No III' (Dublin, National Library of Ireland, 1904), f. 80 (MS 4294).

[22] Hughes, *The Pre-Victorian Drama in Dublin*, p. 19.

[23] Dublin, Registry of Deeds, Vol. 83, p. 384, no. 59396.

Post of 21 April 1721.[24] The poem makes reference to Stretch in a manner that would suggest he was a notorious figure, which would indicate that he had been established in Dublin for some time prior to its publication. *The Puppet Show* applauds the use of puppets for satirical purposes. The line 'Powel and Stretch the hint pursue' associates Stretch with the very famous English puppet showman, Martin Powell, who was notorious for his satirical puppet performances.[25] Powell's company was first established in Bath in 1709 and operated at 'Mr Powell's Great Room' during the summer months. The company also entertained audiences at 'Punch's Theatre', near Covent Garden in London during the theatre seasons of 1710 to 1712. 'Punch's Theatre' was a large room fitted out as a playhouse of the time, with a full-sized stage, complete with boxes, pit and gallery.[26] Powell also performed in other locations. According to notes by W.J. Lawrence, Powel visited Dublin at least once, as part of a series of visits to Scotland, France and Ireland between 1695 and 1705.[27] Perhaps it was such a visit that prompted Stretch to establish a puppet theatre in Ireland. Powell was very successful in attracting audiences for conventional theatre. An observer of the time remarked of the puppeteer: 'Mr Powell, by subscriptions and full house, has gathered such wealth as is ten times sufficient to buy all the poets in England.' [28] We know that, like Stretch, Powell's puppet theatre also featured marionettes as several contemporary references mention dancing puppets and wires used by the puppeteer to control them.[29] For example, *A Second Tale of the Tub* (1715), which combined the personae of Powell and Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford in order to lampoon the latter, included a frontispiece depicting marionettes.[30]

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[24] Jonathan Swift and Harold Herbert Williams, *The poems of Jonathan Swift* (2d ed., Oxford, 1958), p. 1103.

[25] Ibid., p. 1104

[26] George Speaight, 'Powell from the Bath' in *Studies in English theatre history in memory of Gabrielle Enthover, O.B.E., first president of the Society for Theatre Research, 1948-1950.* (Annual Publication, 3, London, 1952), pp 38–51.

[27] William J. Lawrence, 'Records of the Dublin stage from 1700 to 1718, when there was one theatre only and the period was marked by the famous "Tamerlane" riot, Thurmond's dispute with the Smock Alley Sharers, and the debut of James Quin' (Cincinatti, Ohio, University of Cincinnati Archives and Rare Books Library, 1926) (William J. Lawrence Notebooks on the History of Irish Theater, PN2602.D8 L3 v.3, PN2602.D8 L3 v.3).

[28] Daniel Defoe, *Les Soupirs de La Grand Britaigne, or, The Groans of Great Britain: Being the Second Part of The Groans of Europe* (London: John Baker, 1713) cited in John Ashton, *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne* (Adamant Media, 2004), p. 236.

[29] *Tatler* writes of Powell, that 'I can look beyond his wires, and know very well the whole trick of his art' 'Thursday, July 21, 1709. STEELE', in *The Tatler*, ed. by Richard Steele, Cambridge Library Collection - Literary Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), I, 387–95. Powell's puppets are described as 'actors of wood and wire' *Spectator,* 6th May 1712.

[30] Thomas & Duckett Burnet George, *A Second Tale of a Tub: The History of Robert Powel, the Puppet-Show Man.* (London, 1715).

One historian has described him as 'a genius who gained the esteem of Addison and Steele and has had his name and fame preserved in the pages of *The Spectator and The Tatler*'. [31] For example, an issue of *The Spectator* in March 1711, featured a letter, supposedly from the Sexton of St Paul's church in Covent Garden, complaining that his congregation are flocking not to his services, but to 'a Puppett-show set forth by one Powell' and that 'Mr Powell has a full Congregation, while we have a very thin House'. The writer asked 'that Punchinello may chuse Hours less canonical',[32] suggesting that rescheduling the puppet performances would not put them in direct competition with church services. While the letter was, in all likelihood, a satirical piece written by *The Spectator*, it provides some evidence of the popularity of Powell's puppet theatre at the time.

The Puppet Show provides yet more insight into the ways in which Stretch was perceived by contemporaries. The poem was originally included in the first collection of the works of Jonathan Swift, published by George Faulkner in 1762. Although many have attributed *The Puppet Show* to Swift on this basis, the identity of the author of the poem has been debated. Indeed, Swift wrote to Charles Ford on 15 April 1721, referring to the 'very pretty copy of verses on Puppet shews' prompted by Sheridan's play *Punch Turned Schoolmaster*, commenting that 'We cannot find the author and it is not Delany'. [33] Although this would suggest that the poem was not written by Swift, some regard the reference to Delaney as a decoy to divert suspicion away from his own authorship of the poem.[34] Indeed, some researchers argue that the style of the poem is consistent with that of Swift and that the personal reference to 'Tom' Sheridan, a close friend of Swift's, in the following verse:

> Tell Tom he draws a farce in vain,
> Before he looks in nature's glass;
> Puns cannot form a witty scene,
> Nor pedantry for humour pass.[35]

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[31] William J. Lawrence, 'Marionette Operas' in *Musical Quarterly*, x, no. 2 (1924), pp 236–243.

[32] *Spectator,* 16th March 1711.

[33] David Nichol Smith, *The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford* (Oxford, 1935).

[34] Joseph McMinn, 'Swift and Theatre' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, xvi (2001), pp 35–46.

[35] Jonathan Swift, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. William Ernst Browning (London, 1910), p. 171.

Criticism of the use of puns in this verse has also been interpreted as evidence of Swift's authorship by scholars such as Faulkner and more recently, Harold Williams, who included *The Puppet Show* in his 1958 *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*.[36]

Of course, Sheridan's play *Punch Turned Schoolmaster* is believed to have been a response to the popularity of Stretch's puppet show, to which audiences had been flocking. Sheridan's play attempted to parody Stretch by featuring actors adopting the role of puppets. All that remains of the farce today is the prologue which opens with the lines:

> Gallants, our business is to let you know,
> This night we represent a Puppet-Show,
> Where every actor comes to make a figure
> Big as the life, and some, indeed, much bigger.
> The truth of what I tell you will appear
> When you behold our Punch and Banimeer.[37]

The prologue implies that the play included a mock-puppet show and satirical commentary admitting that the dwindling audiences at Smock Alley were a result of the recent opening of Stretch's Puppet Theatre:

> We found this house was almost empty grown
> From the first moment Stretch appeared in town.
> What could we do but learn to squek and hop it,
> Each actor change into his fav'rite puppet?
> Think not in this we banter or abuse you;
> We'll turn to anything before we'll lose you.[38]

The reference to 'learn to squek it' is the use of a device by puppeteers to make the high-pitched voice associated with the character of Punch, who was central to most of the performances at Stretch's theatre. The 'hop it' may be a swipe at Edward Hopkins, then chief secretary to the lord lieutenant, Charles Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton – and, shortly after, to become the master of the revels. The prologue was, in effect, satirising the satire, but also admitting to the impact of the puppet theatre on Smock Alley.

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[36] The poem was originally attributed to Dean Swift in George Faulkner's 1762 *The Works of Jonathan Dean Swift* and in Walter Scott's publication of the same title in 1814. More recently, the poem was included in the 1958 *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, edited by Harold Williams.

[37]The prologue first appeared in Matthew Concanen, *Miscellaneous Poems by Several Hands* (London: J. Peele, 1724), p. 398-400. See also Hogan, p. 116.

[38] Robert Hogan (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Sheridan* (Newark, 1994), p. 116.

Sheridan's prologue also identifies Stretch's Capel Street location and further evidence of the rivalry between Stretch's puppet performances and the mainstream theatre of the time:

> I now proceed to beg our Punch may meet
> As much applause as he in Capel Street.
> Our Banimeer speaks Hebrew, Greek and Latin;
> Their Punch speaks nonsense, yet is ever prating.[39]

Whether it was authored by Swift or someone in his circle, *The Puppet Show* supports the idea that, as Linde Katritzky has put it, 'the satiric possibilities of inanimate puppets were increasingly utilized in political controversies'.[40] The important role of Stretch and Powel in satirising affairs of the day is particularly well illustrated in two verses of the poem:

> Thus Daedalus and Ovid too,
> That man's a blockhead have confessed,
> Powel and Stretch the hint pursue;
> Life is the farce, the world a jest.
>
> …Go on, great Stretch, with artful hand,
> Mortals to please and to deride,
> And when death breaks thy vital band
> Thou shalt put on a puppet's pride.[41]

The poem also remarks on the folly of those responsible for the 1720 South Sea Company speculation and subsequent stock market crash and juxtaposes legislators of the time with the wooden puppets:

> The same great truth South Sea hath proved
> On that famed theatre, the ally,
> Where thousands by directors moved
> Are now sad monuments of folly.
>
> …Some draw our eyes by being great,
> False pomp conceals mere wood within,

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[39] Ibid, p. 117

[40] Linde Katritzky, 'Puppetry in Eighteenth-Century England and Germany and in the Nachtwachen von Bonaventura' in *Arcadia*, xlv, no. 1 (2010), p. 53.

[41] Swift, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, p. 170.

And legislators rang'd in state
Are oft but wisdom in machine.

… To make men act as senseless wood,
And chatter in a mystic strain,
Is a mere force on flesh and blood,
And shows some error in the brain.[42]

The location of Stretch's puppet theatre may also explain Sheridan's interest in Stretch's affairs. A lease between Dame Elizabeth Tilson and John Dawson, dated 1758, refer to 'several houses, particularly a late meeting house now made use of for Stretche's Puppet Shew, formerly in the possession of Jonathan Atkinson and now in the possession of Reprosontatives of Aldermn John Walker', which serves to confirm that Stretch's theatre was located on Capel Street in the early eighteenth century .[43] This location would put Stretch's puppet theatre in close proximity to the private school run by Sheridan, which he established at the old Mint-house in Capel Street.

Further challenges to legitimate theatre

Throughout the 1720s, Stretch's theatre drew on diverse audiences to rival that of the legitimate theatres of the time. W. J. Lawrence contended that the impact of puppet theatre in Dublin cannot be overstated: 'The new entertainment proved so attractive to the rank and fashion of the town that the theatre in Smock Alley was deserted.' [44] This new entertainment added to existing theatre rivalry for an already limited Dublin audience, where 'there was not a large enough theatre-going population to sustain a play for more than a few nights.' [45] Thomas Sheridan, as a theatre manager and Deputy Master of the Revels, published pamphlets on the problems of Dublin theatres and argued strongly for just a single proper theatre in the city. [46]

There is some evidence to suggest that Stretch was targeting audiences for legitimate theatre. For example, advertisements in contemporary periodicals suggest that many of Stretch's performances were presented in the style of legitimate theatre offerings of the time. For example, one notice in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* in January 1642 informed readers that

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[42] Ibid, p. 170

[43] The earlier memorial is dated 8th February 1744 (Vol 116, page 323, no 80604) and the later memorial is dated 27th June 1770 (Vol 280, page 374, no 181929).

[44] Lawrence, 'A Famous Dublin Show'.

[45] Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000*, p. 38.

[46] Thomas Sheridan, *An humble appeal to the publick, together with some considerations on the present critical and dangerous state of the stage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1758).

> On Tuesday next, being the 12th Inst, at Mr Stretch's Theatre in Caple-Street will be acted a pleasant and new comedy called The Health Restoring Eagle. To which will be added a new Operetical farce called Punch's courtship and Wedding. The particulars will be included in his bills.[47]

There is also evidence that contemporaries perceived Stretch's theatre as a rival to legitimate theatre. Puppet theatres were not generally considered important enough to be licensed and generally escaped taxation, but Stretch's theatre appears to have become an exception to this rule. Since Stretch attracted the audience of mainstream theatres, competitors argued that Stretch's Puppet Theatre should be licensed by the Master of the Revels. When Edward Hopkins was appointed Master of the Revels by royal patent in 1722 and granted a salary of £300, the king did not specify how this money was to be funded. As such, it was open to Hopkins to levy theatres to generate his remuneration.

In 1724, manager of the Smock Alley theatre, Thomas Elrington persuaded Hopkins to demand a licence fee of £50 from Stretch's puppet theatre – half the amount Elrington was paying for Smock Alley. While theatres fell within the purview of the master of the revels, visiting companies of strolling players performed in Dublin at the discretion of the of the Lord Mayor. Stretch responded by requesting that the lord mayor grant him a licence enabling Stretch's company to continue to perform as strolling players. Elrington was not in a position to object as he had availed of the lord mayor's powers for the Smock Alley players just two years before, when he sought to escape Hopkins' attempt to levy a theatrical licence fee on Smock Alley.[48] While the involvement of the lord mayor was a practical solution to avoiding the licence fee, the episode also provided an opportunity for publicity and satire. For example, this attempt to penalise Stretch for his success is remembered in a 1724 satirical broadside pamphlet, *Punch's Petition to the Ladies*, [49] in which Punch appeals to 'Fair ones who do all hearts command' to come to his rescue:

> Fair ones who do all hearts command,
> And gently sway with fan in hand

[47] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 9 Jan 1742.

[48] Further details of the Lord Mayor's intervention on behalf of Smock Alley can be found in Osborough, *The Irish Stage*, pp 13–21.

[49] Swift & Williams, *The poems of Jonathan Swift*, p. 1109.

Your favourite - Punch a suppliant falls,
And humbly for assistance calls.[50]

The author of the broadside used the opportunity to needle those in authority and to satirise several events of the time. Hopkins' move is portrayed as an abuse of his power and questions his authority to regulate 'our pigmy land' of the puppet theatre, describing the marionettes as 'idle wooden things'.

The gothic rage of Vander Hop,
Wh'invades without pretence and right,
Or any law but that of might,
Our Pigmy land--and treats our kings
Like paltry idle wooden things.[51]

Hopkins portrayal as bullying the residents of Stretch's theatre continues as he was accused of having 'broke our wires…' and 'to force us from our little home'. The logic of charging puppets for performing is also questioned in the line 'Then since we are but mimic men, pray let us pay in mimic coin.' [52]

Contemporary political satire included in the verse is mention of 'the Chancellor' is a reference to Alan Brodrick, lord chancellor Midleton, against whom a vote of censure had been passed in the House of Lords in 1723.[53] Similarly, mention of 'brass counters made by William Wood' is reference to the granting of a patent to William Wood to coin £100,800 of copper halfpence for Ireland – a move met by popular agitation led by Swift. *Punch's Petition* underlines the ability of Stretch and his puppets to lampoon and satirise the elite of the time.

The final lines of the verse are a plea for the support of the ladies who have enjoyed Stretch's entertainments to use their feminine wiles to persuade Hopkins to allow the theatre to continue without payment of the proposed licence fee – and manages to get a dig at Hopkins' suggested weakness for the ladies:

Now, fair ones, if e'er I found grace,
Or if my jokes did ever please,
Use all your interest with your sec,

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[50] Hogan (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Sheridan*, p. 239.

[51] Ibid, p. 239.

[52] Ibid, p. 241

[53] James Roderick O'Flanagan, *The lives of the lord chancellors and keepers of the great seal of Ireland: from the earliest times to the reign of Queen Victoria* (London, 1870), p. 29.

(They say he's at the ladies' beck,)

And though he thinks as much of gold

As ever Midas did of old:

Your charms I'm sure can never fail,

Your eyes must influence, must prevail;

At your command he'll set us free,

Let us to you owe liberty.

Get us a license now to play,

And we'll in duty ever pray.[54]

The satirical lines in which Stretch's battle with officialdom of the time is celebrated are attributed variously to Swift and Sheridan. According to the *English Short Title Catalogue*, two editions of *Punch's Petition* were produced in 1724, and one copy of each edition is extant, both held by the Huntington Library, California. One of the surviving copies, includes a handwritten note, explaining that the publication was 'Written upon Secretary Hopkins refusing to let Stretch act without a large sum of money'. [55] This handwriting was believed to be that of Swift, supporting the idea that he may have been the author. [56] The piece may have been written either as part of Stretch's campaign to resist the fee or afterwards to commemorate the plea of the puppets. Either way, the matter was resolved by the decision of the lord mayor to take Stretch under his protection and granted him permission to continue to entertain Dubliners from Capel Street.

Stretch's struggle with Hopkins and Smock Alley in the person of Thomas Elrington also features in a 1730 satirical broadside pamphlet, *Punchinell's Embassy*, which casts the latter as 'Emperor of the Theatre' and Stretch as 'Prince Stretch'. [57] The humour of the satirical piece is so well composed that it can be easily enjoyed some 300 years later. It is addressed 'to the most mighty and puissant Ton, Ring, Le, Sam, Tho, [anagram for Elrington] emperor of the theatre and all the delightful territories in the province of Smock-Ally'. The broadside goes on to provide an account 'of the quarrel between Ton, Ring, Le, Sam, Tho, and Prince Stretch' and how 'a certain Monarch, call'd a Mayor' charitably came to the Prince's rescue. The piece firmly puts it up to Elrington when it contends that '…if the subtle Ton, Ring, Le, Sam, Tho,

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[54] Hogan (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Sheridan*, p. 242.

[55] 'Punch's petition to the ladies' (San Marino, California, The Huntington Library, 1724) (Rare Books, 143201, 143201).

[56] William Robert Wilde, *The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life* (Dublin, 1849), p. 171.

[57] An original copy of *Punchell's Embassy* can be found in volume 95 of the Royal Irish Academy's Halliday Collection.

can't break the Union of the Mayor and the Prince, it will be out of his power ever to attack him with success'.

It seems that Stretch was not the only competition faced by Smock Alley. For example the Signora Violante dancing troupe,[58] which had appeared at Smock Alley in 1729 with great success, had established itself in a booth in Dame Street by 1730– causing a further pull on Smock Alley audiences.[59] The records of the Smock Alley Theatre in 1731 include evidence of the irritation that Stretch and Violante had become for Smock Alley in the form of a ballad sung by a Mrs Sterling, which included the lines:

> To Signior Scaramouch and Punchinello!
> Fly to your wooden brethren, O mon Dieu!
> Blest, ye toupees, with no more brains than you![60]

While the sum of £50 was not insubstantial in 1730, given the success of the puppet theatre, it is likely that Stretch would have been able to meet this licence fee, so the public support was probably based more on the theatre's popularity than on any likelihood of its closure. The puppeteer may have made more of the David and Goliath struggle for promotional purposes than anything else.

Legal documents from the period suggest that Stretch was a man of some wealth. A memorandum, dated September 1736, details an indenture of mortgage between 'Randall Stretch of the city, Showman' and Alderman John Walker. [61] The interesting aspect of this mortgage was that it was Walker, an alderman of the city (and later Lord Mayor of Dublin) and man of substantial property, who was borrowing £300 from Stretch, a puppet master. In return, the indenture of mortgage provides Stretch with security on a substantial property owned by Walker.[62] Such registered mortgages of the period were common ways of providing an investment on one hand and a means of raising short-term cash on the other. That Stretch was the source of a substantial amount of such cash identifies him as a man of some means – presumably based on a financially rewarding Capel Street venue. Randal Stretch had

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[58] Grainne McArdle, 'Signora Violante and Her Troupe of Dancers 1729-32' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, xx (2005), pp 55–78.

[59] According to theatre historian W. J. Lawrence, "What with the success of this entertainment [Stretch] and the vogue of Madame Violante's rope-dancing, Smock Alley playhouse was deserted." - William J. Lawrence, 'Dean Swift and the Dublin Stage' in *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin, 5 Aug. 1905).

[60] William J. Lawrence, 'Some Old Dublin Side Shows' in *Saturday Herald* (Dublin, 11 July 1908).

[61] Dublin, Registry of Deeds, Vol 83, p. 384, no 59396.

[62] The mortgage, dated 22 September 1736, provided for the payment of interest on the £300 while Stretch held, as security, a hold on a Dublin city property worth £683. Dublin, Registry of Deeds, Vol 83, p. 384, no 59396.

successfully faced down the established theatre, turning the tables on Smock Alley in garnering publicity from the theatre's attempt to usurp him. The legal records of the time indicate that his popularity and professional success were likely reflected in corresponding financial rewards.

Continued success in Capel Street

Randal Stretch's success continued into the 1730s, when advertisements for his 'entertainments' at Capel Street continue to appear in Dublin newspapers. Stretch continued to make the most of his rivalry with Smock Alley, poking fun at their benefit performances for chosen actors – or Hopkins himself. One way of garnering publicity was to advertise a puppet show as being 'for the benefit' of the puppets themselves:

> At the request of several Gentlemen and Ladies. For the benefit of Mr. Punchinello and his wife Joan. On Wednesday next being the 7th of this Instant April 1736 will be shewn Mr. Stretch's Diversion in Capel Street, with a Humorous new Prologue to be spoke by your humble servant, Punch; with several entertainments. Beginning at seven of the clock in the evening.[63]

Capel Street proved to be fortunate in many ways for Randal Stretch, as, in October 1736, he married Alice Marshall, the eldest daughter of a Capel Street Watchmaker William Marshall. [64] The marriage may have prompted the financial transaction involving the mortgage given to Alderman John Walker, although there is no remaining record of a marriage settlement relating to this union. There is evidence of Stretch's continuing financial means in a memorial of deed of assignment made in 1740, when he leased a property in Plunkett Street for an annual rent of £14.[65]

1740s Dublin provided continued success for the Capel Street venture, with advertisements in Faulkner's Dublin Journal inviting audiences to attend 'Mr Stretch's Theatre' to see 'a new comedy called the Health Restoring Eagle', not forgetting the central character of Punch who would feature in an operatical farce about the puppet's courtship and wedding. In February of 1742 Stretch's theatre closed for the season, reopening its doors in November of that year.[66] The rivalry between Dublin entertainments continued throughout the 1740s, noted in one of

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[63] *Dublin Evening Post*, 27-30 March 1736; *Dublin Evening Post* 30 March – 3 April 1736.

[64] Dublin, Church of Ireland RCB Library, P.0277, Vol 1, p. 11.

[65] Dublin, Registry of Deeds, Vol. 99, p. 392, no. 69720.

[66] An advertisement declared that 'Mr Stretch's Diversion in Capel-street to take place every Tuesday and Saturday until Shrove Tuesday and no more this season' *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 30 January 1742. The reopening of the theatre is flagged in the same publication on 30 Oct 1742.

Stretch's advertisements when he takes a swipe at visiting European performers as he declares that 'as he is no foreigner, and spends what he gets in the Kingdom, he hopes to meet with due encouragement as usual.'[67]

Advertisements for 1743 provide a sense that the Capel Street theatre had become a fixture on the Dublin calendar of entertainments. Notices in early 1743 indicate a similar performance season. 'Mr Stretch's Company of Artificial Comedians will perform at his Theatre in Caple-Street, every Tuesday and Saturday, till Shrove-tide, that being the usual time of leaving off; beginning at 6 o'clock in the Evening.' [68]

Stretch's ability to hold his own among Dublin entertainments during the 1740s is noted by theatre historians. Sheldon's account of Thomas Sheridan (junior) describes the puppet theatre as a continuing thorn in the side of their human counterparts: 'There are notices for only two performances in the Dublin theatres for over a month from December 10, 1744, to January 17, 1745. The regular stage in Dublin was dwindling away, while Stretch's puppet show, its only serious rival, prospered.' [69]

At the height of Stretch's career, he succumbed to the sentiment in a line from the 1721 poem *The Puppet Show*, that warns 'when death breaks thy vital band'. [70] Randal Stretch died on Friday, 8 March 1744 and his passing was suitably noted in the publications that had helped to make his fortune: 'Last Friday died Mr Stretch, the famous Puppet-Shew-man, who hath so agreeably entertained the Town for many years past'. [71] Stretch was buried on 12 March 1744 in the graveyard of St Mary's Church, where he had been married just eight years previously. [72] This graveyard is now Wolfe Tone Park, where the original gravestones are set flat into the ground and along the perimeter wall, but the inscriptions have, for the most part, been weathered away.

Such was the extent of Randal Stretch's influence on eighteenth-century Dublin that it continued long after his death. Stretch's Puppet Show outlived its founder, with advertisements and other references to the Capel Street theatre continuing for a decade or more. Despite his absence, the new season opened in October 1744, with performances on

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[67] *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 02-06 November 1742. Similar advertisements continued throughout November and December 1742.

[68] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 1 February 1742.

[69] Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan of Smock-Alley, 1719-1788*, p. 54.

[70] Swift, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, p. 171.

[71] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 10-13 March 1744.

[72] Dublin, Church of Ireland RCB Library, P.0277, Vol 2.

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Admission was 'Pit 1/1; next seats a British sixpence; gallery 4d.' Performances were scheduled to start at 6pm, with advertisements warning that 'No money to be returned after the raising of the curtain'.[73]

Mention of Stretch's theatre and performances of 'artificial comedians' in Capel Street continue to be found into the 1760s. An advertisement as late as May 1777, describes a Shane McBreaghagh as 'successor to Stritch, late Manager of the Puppet Shew in Caple Street.'[74] James Harvey is described as Manager of the theatre in 1763 and demonstrates some of Randal Stretch's ability to garner publicity in a letter to Faulkner's Dublin Journal. The letter complains about the 'puffery' in the newspaper afforded to a performance in Smock Alley and that 'we are equally concerned to give praise to another dramatic piece exhibited by Mr. Stretch's company in Capel Street… which deserves every success…'[75] Documents in the Registry of Deeds indicate that the original theatre was still occupied by Stretch's company in the summer of 1758, describing the property as 'several houses, particularly a late Meeting House now made use of for Stretches Puppet Shew'.[76]

Advertisements for Punch and his marionettes in December 1763 promise that 'Punch will walk on the wire and balance a small sword' [77] However, by 1767, Stretch's theatre seems to have been adopted for other performances. *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* reports on a 'menagerie to be seen in Stritch's puppet-shew theatre in Capel Street.'[78] This animal act seems to have either continued to occupy the theatre or to have returned the following year, because in July 1768 Faulkner records that 'Yesterday a young lad who went to see the wild beasts in the Theatre in Capel Street, approaching too near these desperate animals, was seized by a leopard, who tore him so desperately before he could be succoured, that he soon after expired.'[79]

Given the continued notoriety of Stretch's theatre after his death, it is worth considering if the enterprise had been continued by his family and that some of the later references to Stretch might have been to another member of the family. Although Randal Stretch and Alice

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[73] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 16 October 1744.

[74] Freeman's Journal, 15 May 1777.

[75] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 4 February 1763.

[76] Registry of Deeds, Vol 196, p. 32, no 128959, (30 June 1758); and Vol 195, p. 46, no 128961 (30 August 1758).

[77] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 3 December 1763.

[78] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 21 April 1767.

[79] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 6 July 1768.

Marshall had two sons, both died in infancy.[80] The absence of a continuing direct line is also illustrated in the beneficiaries mentioned in Randal Stretch's will, who comprise his wife Alice, his sister Anne (Beasley) and niece Mary (Beasley).[81] Whatever mention of Stretch's theatre after 1744 was based entirely on the impact of his professional life of some 25 years before then.

Conclusion

Puppetry continued as a form of popular entertainment in Dublin in the centuries that followed, but never as successfully, or with such appeal to adult audiences, as Stretch's company. British and European puppet theatres toured Ireland throughout the nineteenth century, and some took up residence Dublin for many months at a time but no indigenous puppet theatre comparable to that of Stretch's, in terms of significance or longevity, operated in Ireland in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century, that another puppeteer, Eugene Lambert, was to make as significant an impression on the public as Stretch did 250 years previously.[82] Of course Lambert's success was aided by his extensive work on Irish television.

Stretch demonstrated the effective use of puppets for lampooning those in authority throughout his career. A satirical voice attributed to an inanimate object is often not given credence by either taking it seriously or engaging with it. However, the words are still spoken, and the subject feels the sting of satirical attack as strongly as though they were delivered by a human actor or commentator. The satirical use of puppets in this way has continued across the centuries and is today most evident in ventriloquism on stage and television.

As an impresario, Stretch spearheaded the graduation of the puppet theatre from fairground attraction to theatrical performance in eighteenth-century Dublin. The attention paid to Stretch by Swift and his circle provides insight into his impact and, perhaps, Stretch's own abilities as a self-publicist. As his epitaph stated, Stretch 'hath so agreeably entertained the

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[80] Records for St Mary's Church (Dublin, Church of Ireland RCB Library) record the baptism of two sons to Randal Stretch and Alice Marshall. Jessop, baptised on 7August 1737 (P.0277, Vol 1, p. 106), the burial of whom is subsequently recorded on 27 August 1737 (P.0277, Vol 1); and John, baptised on 24 June 1740 (P.0277, Vol 2), the burial of whom is recorded on 8th July 1740 (P.0277, Vol 2).

[81] The will of Randal Stretch was destroyed in the fire at the Public Record Office in June 1922. However, *Vicar's Index to Wills* dates the will as having been drawn up on 16 January 1743. *Betham's Abstracts* record the granting of probate on 29th March 1744 and the beneficiaries as relatives of the deceased as mentioned.

[82] McCormick, 'Lambert Theatre and Puppetry Redefined'.

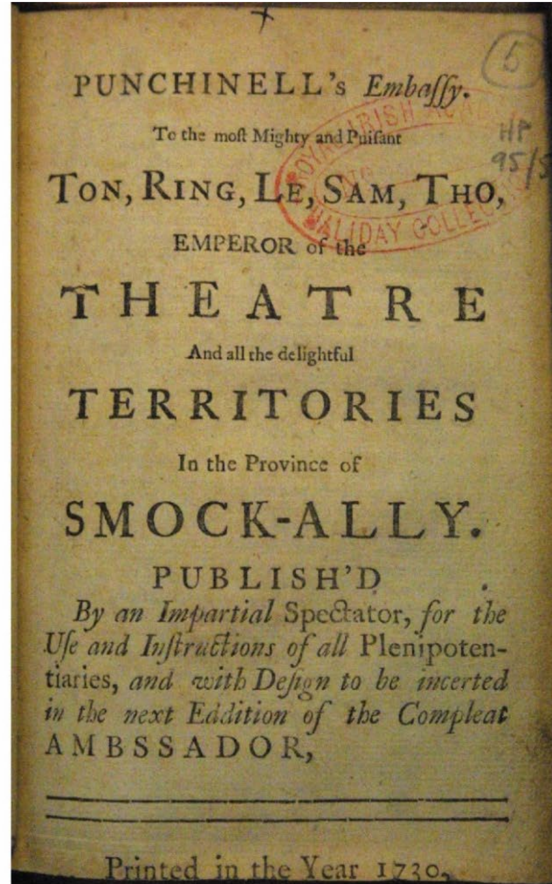
Town for many years past'.[83] His satirical efforts were to inspire generations of Irish puppeteers, but few were to surpass his achievements.

[83] Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 10-13 March 1744.

2.3 Randal Stretch Illustrations

Punchinell's Embassy:
A 1730 satrical pamphlet commemorating Randal Stretch's struggles with Smock Alley Manager and Deputy Master of the Revels, Thomas Elrington. The broadside casts the latter as 'Emperor of the Theatre' and puppeteer Stretch as 'Prince Stretch'.

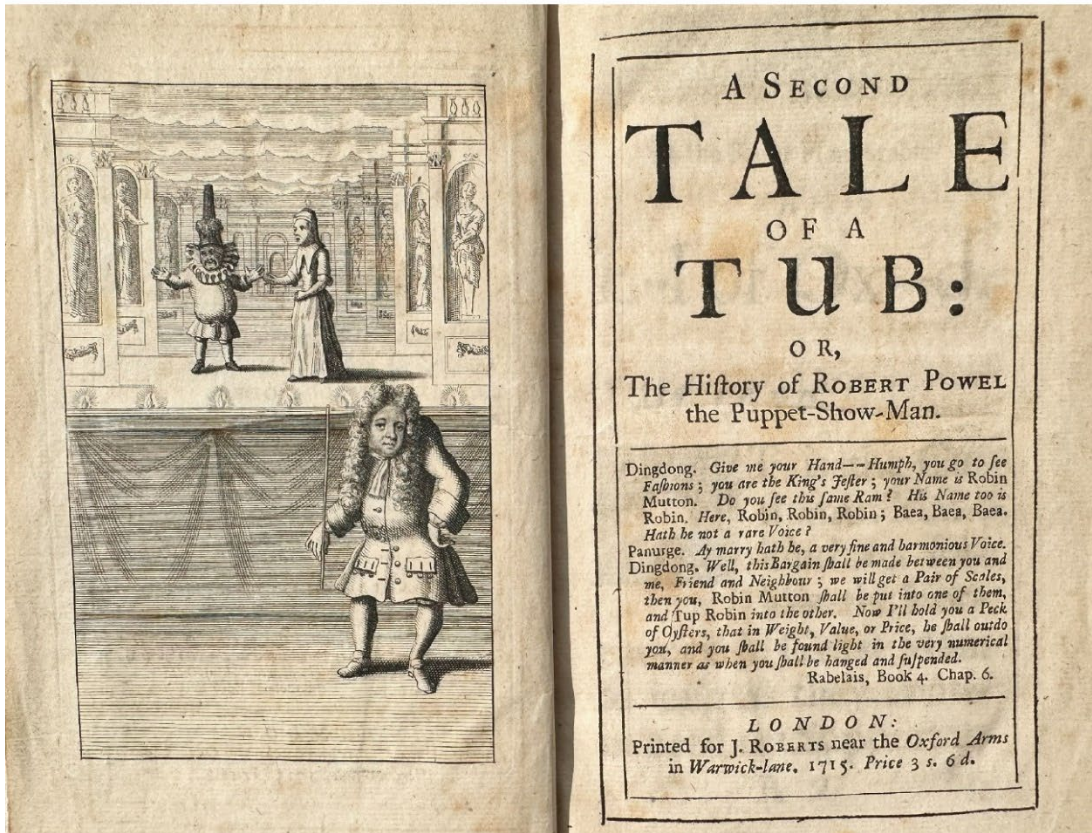
Reproduced courtesy of
The Royal Irish Academy.


PUNCHINELL's *Embaſſy*.
To the moſt Mighty and Puiſant
TON, RING, LE, SAM, THO,
EMPEROR of the
THEATRE
And all the delightful
TERRITORIES
In the Province of
SMOCK-ALLY.
PUBLISH'D
By an Impartial Spectator, *for the Uſe and Inſtructions of all* Plenipotentiaries, *and with Deſign to be incerted in the next Eddition of the Compleat* AMBSSADOR,

Printed in the Year 1730.

A Second Tale of a Tub:
Opening pages of a political satire aimed at Robert Harley, but incorporating apparently true references to puppeteer Martin Powell - including his hunchback appearance. Powell was the likely inspiration for Randal Stretch's theatre.

Image of frontspiece and cover page from the author's copy of the book.


A SECOND
TALE
OF A
TUB:
OR,
The Hiſtory of ROBERT POWEL
the Puppet-Show-Man.

Dingdong. *Give me your Hand---Humph, you go to ſee Faſhions; you are the King's Jeſter; your Name is* Robin Mutton. *Do you ſee this ſame Ram? His Name too is* Robin. *Here,* Robin, Robin, Robin; Baea, Baea, Baea. *Hath he not a rare Voice?*
Panurge. *Ay marry hath he, a very fine and harmonious Voice.*
Dingdong. *Well, this Bargain ſhall be made between you and me, Friend and Neighbour; we will get a Pair of Scales, then you,* Robin Mutton *ſhall be put into one of them, and* Tup Robin *into the other. Now I'll hold you a Peck of Oyſters, that in Weight, Value, or Price, he ſhall outdo you, and you ſhall be found light in the very numerical manner as when you ſhall be hanged and ſuſpended.*
Rabelais, Book 4. Chap. 6.

LONDON:
Printed for J. ROBERTS near the *Oxford Arms* in *Warwick-lane*. 1715. *Price* 3 *s.* 6 *d.*

Chapter 3: Waxworks & Marionette Theatre Impresario, Lambert D'Arc (1823-1893)

3.1 Introduction

Despite the generally held view to the contrary, this article illustrates that Ireland has enjoyed a historical presence of puppet performance. Furthermore, as this article demonstrates, Ireland has been a place of innovation and inspiration for puppetry. Although Lambert D'Arc was a French national, it was while he lived in Ireland that he started his marionette theatre, and it was with the assistance of some Irish figure workers and musicians that he was able to achieve the level of success that he did.

As we see in some of the other case studies, the scale and significance of puppet theatre is often understated in retrospect. D'Arc's marionette theatre went on to entertain audiences in over ten countries, a legacy from which his children were able to create an international touring company which is acknowledged as one of the most significant Victorian marionette companies in the world. Such international impact is not commonplace amongst other art forms or theatrical performance.

The importance of cultural networks for puppet performance is evident from this particular case study. Not only did D'Arc's immediate family continue to perform for some forty years after his death, but many of those he employed or partnered with became significant figures in each of the leading marionette companies of the period. A perusal of the classified advertisements within nineteenth-century entertainment trade newspapers illustrates the skill sets and roles that were required by puppet theatres. Notices as to the availability of personnel and positions indicate the employment and re-employment of experienced workers, which would have spread the expertise and knowledge within the sector as people moved from one puppet company to another.

D'Arc himself is an example of the extent to which puppetry been developed through cultural and artistic networks. D'Arc's training as a sculptor shows the extent to which other forms of creative arts are an integral part of puppet performance. The puppet theatre in Ireland provided opportunities for a variety of Irish creative artists and performers to apply their skills and experience to this form of expression. Ireland was a place of inspiration, innovation, and experimentation, allowing such artists to develop their own expertise and creativity and to be a significant influence on the development of puppetry as a form of expression in Ireland and internationally.

As puppetry's engagement with the introduction of television in the twentieth century mirrored the art form's ability to adapt in the previous century. In the nineteenth century, as

working conditions improved, new audiences with time and money sought out entertainment on which new business ventures could be based. Marionette performances based on human opera and stage productions offered a novel way in which middle-class audiences could enjoy familiar material.

As Randal Stretch had achieved financial success on Dublin's Capel Street puppet theatre in the eighteenth century, Lambert D'Arc established a nineteenth-century puppet venture that was not only a viable, but a lucrative business. The continual re-emergence of puppet performance throughout Irish cultural history depended on people like Stretch and D'Arc in their role as entrepreneurial showmen. It is important to note that D'Arc never manipulated a puppet himself but was key to the success and development of the most successful puppet theatres of the period. His entrepreneurial spirit allowed him to make bold decisions, such as D'Arc's sudden sale of his enterprise in Liverpool to return to Dublin and at such a crucial time – even as he considered an invitation to perform in New York. His subsequent sudden and unannounced departure from Dublin eighteen months later only served to embolden him.

3.2 Showmanship and Entrepreneurialism in Nineteenth Century Ireland

Journal article published in *New Hibernia Review*, Winter 2023

Showmanship and Entrepreneurialism in Nineteenth Century Ireland:
The Case of Lambert D'Arc.

The growth of leisure time in the nineteenth century presented new business opportunities for the providing activities and entertainments outside work. Many of these enterprises were established and run by a variety of showmen, impresarios, and entrepreneurs. Throughout the United Kingdom, and Ireland, these men and women often lived by their wits, moving from town to town and generating as much business as possible, while minimising their costs and responsibilities. They were adept at garnering press coverage to generate further custom or to add to their own notoriety.

This article presents a case study of one such showman, illustrating the life and times of these entrepreneurs and the lengths to which they went to make their businesses viable. It provides an insight into the world of Victorian popular entertainment in Britain and Ireland and highlights the impact of the courts, both civil and criminal, on Victorian business life. While Victorian Ireland was part of the British Empire, this chronicle argues that the distinctiveness of Irish culture and politics was significant even within the sphere of popular entertainment.

The article examines recently discovered archival resources and reveals new information that answers questions raised by theatre historians about this showman's affairs. Reassessment of

the life of Lambert D’Arc (1842-1893) provides an insightful case study of Victorian showmen behind popular entertainments of the period. It illustrates how those with resources and foresight could build a substantial business based in entertaining the masses of the nineteenth century.

The prosperity of the Victorian era gave rise to the development of leisure time, from which developed lucrative business ventures based on mass entertainment. as observed by Lee Jackson, ‘The Victorians *were* amused and it could prove to be a very profitable business’.[1]

While theatre, music halls, fairgrounds and circuses are some of the better-known Victorian amusements, as the National Fairground Archive notes, these were not the most popular form of leisure activities: ‘The waxwork display together with the freak show was perhaps the most continually popular travelling type of exhibition in the nineteenth century.’[2] Waxwork displays featured life-like models of famous personalities and historical figures and gruesome depictions of crime and punishment. The proprietors typically supplemented the waxwork exhibitions with other forms of entertainment, including actors who dramatized particular moments in history alongside the waxwork figures. Showmen also included sideshows of musicians, singers and photography to diversify their offerings for a paying public. Travelling waxwork exhibitions were set up in local entertainment venues for months at a time before moving on in search of new audiences in another city.[3] Prior to establishing a London base in 1835, the French entrepreneur Madame Tussaud toured Britain for some twenty years – on the basis that most customers visited the attraction only once.[4]

A countryman of Madame Tussaud, Lambert D’Arc recorded his occupation as a sculptor in the 1861 census for Liverpool, later advertising his services to repair ornaments from the same address.[5] In the course of legal proceedings in 1867, he described himself as having been ‘formerly employed at Madame Tussaud’s in London’, but there is no further mention of this

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[1] Jackson, *Palaces of Pleasure*, p. 3.

[2] University of Sheffield, ‘Waxworks and Tableaux Vivants’ in *National Fairground and Circus Archive*, 2015 (https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/researchandarticles/waxworkandtableauxvivants) (3 June 2023).

[3] For a detailed overview of such travelling entertainments, see *The Greatest Show on Earth* chapter in Judith Flanders, *Consuming Passions: Leisure and Pleasure in Victorian Britain* (London, 2006).

[4] Pamela Pilbeam, ‘Madame Tussaud and the Business of Wax: Marketing to the Middle Classes’ in *Business history*, xlv, no. 1 (2003), p. 17.

[5] Ancestry.com, ‘1861 England Census’ (Provo, UT, USA, 2005) (iCensus Returns of England and Wales, 1861/i. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), 1861., Class: Rg 9; Piece: 2680; Folio: 22; Page: 6; GSU roll: 543011). ‘PERSONS desirous of having broken Figures’ in *Liverpool Daily Post* (Liverpool, 26 Aug. 1861), p. 1.

claim and he never used it to promote himself, casting doubt on its veracity.[6] In 1863, D'Arc joined Springthorpe's Waxworks exhibition in Hull, where 'Several new and Interesting models by Mons. D'Arc have been added to the already beautiful collection'.[7] Having established himself as a waxwork modeller, he advertised for commissions to make waxwork figures when he moved to Manchester the following year.[8] Either by design or by dearth of commissions, D'Arc created his own exhibition over the summer of 1864 as a partnership combining his 'unrivalled wax work exhibition' with Mr and Mrs Brennan's 'burlesque operatic entertainment' at the Royal Albert Rooms in Bristol.[9] This linking of waxworks with other entertainments would prove to be a very successful – and lucrative – business model for the Frenchman. While D'Arc has been the subject of previous inquiries, they have centred on his later development of a marionette theatre company and his significant contribution to nineteenth-century puppet theatre.[10] Far less is known about his business endeavours and his role as a popular entertainment showman and impresario.

Towards the end of 1864, D'Arc established in Cheltenham his 'splendid collection of waxwork figures', which included a chamber of horrors featuring 'the most faithful Portraits of the most noted Murderers'. Newspaper advertisements boldly claimed that this 'artist in wax' was 'patronized by their Majesties the King and Queen of Prussia, their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Meiningen, and many of the highest nobility from the Continent.'[11] D'Arc added the phrase 'Positively closing on Wednesday' to his advertisements in November 1864.[12] He needed to finish the season in time for his marriage in January 1865 to Anne North, who was later to become his successor in the business.[13]

D'Arc toured the south-west of England during 1865 and 1866, broadening the exhibition to include 'his world-renowned Cosmoramic views' and promising visitors they would be 'perfumed with Rimmel's Patent Vaporizer', a device intended to purify the air and provide a

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[6] 'A Terrible Accident to a Waxwork Collection' in *Swansea and Glamorgan Herald* (Swansea, 16 Mar. 1867), p. 5.

[7] 'Springthorpe's Promenade Concerts and Waxwork Exhibition' in *Era* (London, 24 May 1863), p. 12.

[8] 'To Proprietors of Waxwork Exhibitions and Music Halls' in *Era* (London, 19 July 1863), p. 1.

[9] Advertisements throughout July and August 1864, including 'Unrivalled Wax Work Exhibition' in *Western Daily Press* (Bristol, 30 July 1864), p. 1.

[10] McCormick et al., *The Victorian Marionette Theatre*.

[11] 'Mons. D'Arc's Splendid Collection of Waxwork Figures of all Nations' in *Cheltenham Journal* (Cheltenham, 5 Nov. 1864), p. 1.

[12] 'Positively Closing on Wednesday' in *Cheltenham Mercury* (Cheltenham, 12 Nov. 1864), p. 3.

[13] Lambert D'Arc married Anne North at the registry office in Bath on 16 Jan 1865. General Register Office, 'Civil Registration Marriage Index for Bath, Somerset, 1865' (Southport, Mar. 1865) (England and Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915, vol 5c; page 1091.).

pleasant smell for patrons.[14] Cosmoramic Views were images of places created from the perspective of a balloon, or a bird's eye view of towns and cities. Both the vaporizer and the views were popular aspects of Victorian entertainment.

D'Arc also expanded the presentation of his waxworks amusement beyond static exhibits, advertising for 'talent in all branches of the Profession'.[15] In 1865, D'Arc brought his exhibition to Cardiff, where he and his family were to ply their trade, in one form or another, over the following forty-six years. However, the move to Wales was slightly marred by a legal case that underlined how closely showmen had to manage their finances. In December 1866, D'Arc was summonsed for under-payment of rates, which he challenged in court on the basis that he was not liable for the charges during a time he had not yet occupied the premises.[16] Although he lost the case, it illustrates the tenacity that was often necessary to keep an exhibition solvent.

As he developed his enterprise, D'Arc became no stranger to the courts – and more often as plaintiff, than defendant. The showman had recourse to the law on several occasions relating to damage to his waxworks in transit. He sued Baxendale Carriers for injury to some waxworks figures in the carriage to Bristol for exhibit in 1867, claiming damage to twenty of the sixty crates comprising the exhibition pieces.[17] Mindful of the potential publicity, D'Arc attracted much laughter from those present in his cross-examination. Referring to particular figures, he claimed that 'His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex was smashed' and, as he withdrew material from a bag, 'I have a piece of the Duchess of Sutherland's head here…' before correcting himself to more laughter: 'No, I've made a mistake, this is the head of Charlotte Windsor, the murderess'. D'Arc was awarded ninety-four pounds in damages, which was the full amount of his claim.[18]

The waxworks proprietor took a similar case against the London and North-Western Railway in 1874 for a delay in the arrival of twenty of the 111 crates carried from Chester to Halifax, for which he received forty pounds in damages. [19] D'Arc undertook further actions against various carriers over the years. In one against the Great Western Railway Company, the company's

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[14] 'Mons. D'Arc's splendid collection of waxwork figures of all nations' in *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* (Exeter, 17 Feb. 1865), p. 3.

[15] 'Cheltenham St George's Hall (Prop L D'Arc) Wanted Talent' in *Era* (London, 10 Dec. 1865), p. 1.

[16] 'Poor-Rates on the Wooden Circus' in *Cardiff Times* (Cardiff, 21 Dec. 1866), p. 6.

[17] 'A Terrible Accident to a Waxwork Collection'.

[18] D'Arc became a serial litigant, including many claims for damage to his waxworks in transit. He may have deliberately profited from such litigation or may have been particularly unfortunate in repeatedly having his property damaged in this way. His legal targets extended to fellow showmen on occasion: 'A Showman's Action' in *Era* (London, 8 Nov. 1874), p. 7.

[19] 'Claim by a Wax-Work Proprietor' in *Liverpool Weekly Albion* (Liverpool, 18 Apr. 1874), p. 5.

lawyer observed that 'the plaintiff was a gentleman who had travelled about the country a good deal, and that was not the first action by many which he had brought, as the law reports testified'. This statement suggests that while D'Arc may have been unfortunate in having so many incidents in which his waxworks were harmed, he may have been particularly zealous in going to the courts to seek recompense. Goods carriers were not the only targets of D'Arc's legal claims for damage. He took a successful action against fellow showman George Cassidy in 1874 to recover compensation for the loan of a troupe of marionettes and for damage caused to same.[20]

When D'Arc set up his waxworks exhibition in Dublin's Rotunda Rooms in 1868, he was unlikely to have realised his visit would last five years.[21] Neither could he have imagined that his addition of wax marionettes would lead to the creation of one of the world's most famous puppet companies.[22] Artist, puppeteer and author of thirteen books on puppetry, H. W. Whanslaw, describes D'Arc's marionettes as "one of the greatest troupes of marionettes that have been seen in the country".[23]. Theatre historian John Phillips described D'Arc's as 'the leading, and certainly, the most influential of Victorian Marionette Companies'.[24]

D'Arc's visit to Dublin initially mirrored that of his previous tours of England and Wales and received favourable welcome. *The Daily Express* described the collection of waxwork figures as 'one of the best that have ever been exhibited in the city.'[25] The report described one hundred life-sized figures, 'executed with more than ordinary artistic skill'. But D'Arc quickly discovered that although Ireland was part of the empire, an Irish audience might not react as their English or Welsh counterparts. The waxworks included a chamber of horrors in a bid to cater to what Rosalind Crone observes was a 'fascination with murderers and the intricate details of their crimes.'[26]

D'Arc's chamber of horrors included a re-enactment of the execution of the Manchester Martyrs - three Irishmen who were hanged following their conviction of murder in 1867 after an attack on a police van in Manchester, England, left a police officer shot dead. As noted by

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[20] 'A Showman's Action'.

[21] The first published mention of D'Arc's arrival in Dublin is an advertisement, 'Concert Rooms, Rotundo: Mons. D'Arc's Splendid Collection' in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, 25 Sept. 1868), p. 1.

[22] For a detailed account of the development of D'Arc's marionette theatre in Dublin, see Phillips, 'D'Arcs in Dublin'.

[23] H. W. Whanslaw, *Everybody's marionette book* (Redhill, Surrey, 1948), p. 17.

[24] Phillips, 'D'Arcs in Dublin', p. 34.

[25] 'Waxwork Exhibition at the Rotundo' in *Daily Express* (Dublin, 25 Sept. 1868), p. 3.

[26] Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: popular entertainment in nineteenth-century London* (Manchester, 2012), p. 80.

one historian, Ireland reacted to the executions with revulsion and anger with the three men being viewed as political martyrs.[27]

On the day after the exhibition's opening in Dublin, as the waxwork representation of the hangings was enacted, members of the audience rushed the platform and demolished the exhibit in its entirety. Widespread newspaper coverage of the incident included criticism of D'Arc's use of the hanging in this way. 'Foreign artists, English or French, do not understand the Irish; they cannot comprehend their natural refinement of feeling… 'Twas an offence to be sure but we are glad of its commission – proud to see that our people will thus impulsively protest such brutal, shocking exhibitions' and cautioned that 'Mons. D'Arc will, doubtless, better understand the Irish character the occasion of his next visit.'[28] Although the police were called to the incident, D'Arc was pragmatic enough to avoid pressing charges and, in a letter to the *Freeman's Journal*, assured Dublin audiences that 'no disrespect was thereby meant to be conveyed'.[29] The letter stated that he would not press changes against those involved in the destruction of his show even though the damage entailed a loss of sixty pounds. D'Arc's apology was reproduced in various newspapers, gaining further publicity for his exhibition. The offending exhibit did not feature at the Rotunda Rooms again, and D'Arc reduced admission prices to the exhibition, a move highlighted in his advertisements.[30]

Despite D'Arc's pragmatism after the fact, the incident highlights the contradictory similarities and differences between English and Irish societies at that time. As Croone has observed, the public nature of Victorian criminal behaviour and its punishment fostered an almost obsessive interest in crime.[31] Experiencing the macabre and criminal world had become a popular pastime for Victorian society. However, unlike in England, Scotland, or Wales, the same period saw the continuing development of a significant separatist movement in Ireland. The executions were viewed as a violation of an unspoken understanding that drastic measures had been abandoned in relation to Irish matters.[32] The outrage felt by Irish Catholics of all

[27] Mervyn Busteed, 'The Manchester Martyrs: A Victorian Melodrama' in *History Ireland*, xvi, no. 6 (2008), pp 35–37.

[28] 'Foreign artists, English or French, do not understand the Irish' in *Tipperary Free Press* (Clonmel, 29 Sept. 1868), p. 3. The incident gained wide media coverage, including in Belfast and Glasgow. 'The Manchester Martyrs' in *Belfast Morning News* (Belfast, 30 Sept. 1869), p. 5.; 'Extraordinary Scene in a Dublin Waxwork' in *Evening Citizen* (Glasgow, 1 Oct. 1868), p. 3.

[29] 'Waxwork Collection in the Rotundo' in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, 2 Oct. 1868), p. 2.

[30] 'Rotundo: Reduced Charges of Admission' in *Express* (Dublin, 28 Nov. 1868), p. 1.

[31] Crone, *Violent Victorians*, p. 75.

[32] R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848-82* (Dublin, 1985), p. 148.

ranks was exemplified by the description of the executions as 'judicial murder' in the private diary of Home Rule politician, William J. O'Neill Daunt.[33]

Despite the popularity of the chambers of horrors exhibit as a form of entertainment in Britain, it is difficult to understand how D'Arc – or any of his Irish workers or connections – would not have been aware of the level of public anger in Dublin concerning the Manchester Martyrs. The executions are regarded as a turning point for nationalist mobilization and led to some of the largest public protests ever held in Ireland. In Dublin itself, immediately following the executions and ten months before D'Arc's exhibition, a mock funeral had an estimated cortege of thirty to fifty thousand people, with another fifty to seventy thousand demonstrating their support as it passed en route to Glasnevin Cemetery. [34]

Nine months after arriving in Dublin, D'Arc innovated further in a bid to enhance his offering. In July 1869, he advertised the introduction of marionette performances as part of the waxwork exhibition.[35] The advertisements promised 'Comique Burlesques, Acrobats, Contortionists, Jugglers, Bell Ringers, Transformations, and a variety of Grotesque Figures and Nondescripts' in a production of *Babes in the Wood*. As well as offering a fresh experience for his Dublin clientele, D'Arc was able to charge twice the usual admission price for reserved seats at 2pm and 8pm daily performances. The new entertainment immediately received favourable news coverage: 'An interesting novelty has recently been added to this already most interesting exhibition*. …*and the whole thing is just as good as if the puppets were not puppets but were all alive.'[36]

Whatever experience and expertise D'Arc had as a sculptor and waxwork modeller, producing and presenting marionettes would have been unfamiliar territory. As an impresario, he identified and employed the talent available to develop his new enterprise. Subsequent advertisements for 'D'Arc's Mechanical Automation Figures' mention R. C. Donnelly as the 'machinist' or manipulator of the marionettes.[37] Robert C. Donnelly was an English actor and comedian who developed a career as a 'figure worker' for marionette companies and was often referenced in advertisements from marionette proprietors looking for talent. The

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[33] William J. O'Neill Daunt, 'Journals of William J. O'Neill Daunt,' (National Library of Ireland, 1842) (MS 3040-3042).

[34] Owen McGee, '"God Save Ireland": Manchester-Martyr Demonstrations in Dublin, 1867–1916' in *Éire-Ireland*, xxxvi, no. 3–4 (2001), pp 39–66. Lawrence W. McBride, *Images, icons and the Irish nationalist imagination* (Dublin, 1999), p. 26.

[35] 'All Alive at Mons D'Arc's Wax-Work Exhibition' in *Dublin Advertising Gazette* (Dublin, 10 July 1869), p. 1.

[36] 'Mons D'Arc's Waxworks' in *Evening Freeman* (Dublin, 17 July 1869), p. 2.

[37] 'Rotundo-Dublin' in *Saunders's Newsletter and Daily Advertiser* (Dublin, 30 Aug. 1869), p. 2.

partnership between the two men may have originated in Cheltenham, where Donnelly had presented the same marionette production of *Babes in the Wood* around the time D'Arc exhibited there. [38] Donnelly remained with D'Arc's marionettes throughout the five years that D'Arc exhibited in Dublin and was largely responsible for his success there.

D'Arc's marionettes drew healthy audiences and garnered plenty of positive press. Such was the popularity of the marionettes that D'Arc had to remind the public of the waxworks exhibition advertising, 'Notwithstanding the great attraction of the Marionettes, the Wax Work Exhibition still continues with the usual new additions of all the interesting novelties of the day'.[39] D'Arc introduced new productions and enlarged a 'Grand new stage, double the size it was formerly' with 'beautiful new scenery, magnificent new dresses, properties and marvellous mechanical effects'.[40] His marionettes proved even more successful than his waxworks, described by *The Irish Times* as 'most amusing and the wax figures about the best of their kind we have seen'.[41] D'Arc continued to attract audiences to Dublin's Rotunda Rooms with marionette productions and new waxwork exhibits, doubling the size of the marionette stage again in 1871, when he assured Dubliners that 'it is the largest and most valuable exhibition of the kind travelling in the United Kingdom'.[42]

D'Arc used his ongoing success in Dublin over half a decade to become part of the local merchant society - despite occasional public disputes with trade unions and his employees.[43] He built a reputation as a supporter of various charities and good causes, as well as hosting benefit marionette performances - 'More than once has Mons. D'Arc's liberality in the cause of charity been noticed' - and hoped his generosity might be 'rewarded by the increased patronage of the citizens of Dublin'.[44] Moving to a grand house at 14 Upper Gloucester Street,

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[38] 'Original and Unrivalled French Marionettes' in *Cheltenham Examiner* (Cheltenham, 1 Aug. 1866), p. 4.

[39] 'French Waxen Marionette Entertainment' in *Dublin Advertising Gazette* (Dublin, 9 Oct. 1869), p. 2.

[40] 'Great Success of Mons D'Arc's Wax Work and Unrivalled French Wax Marionettes' in *Dublin Advertising Gazette* (Dublin, 6 Nov. 1869), p. 4.

[41] 'Mons. D'Arc's Waxwork Exhibition' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 20 Dec. 1869), p. 5.

[42] 'Great Alterations, Grand New Additions' in *Commercial Journal and Family Herald* (Dublin, 13 May 1871), p. 4.

[43] An 1870 meeting of the Trades' Association agreed that 'a deputation do wait on Mons. D'Arc, proprietor of the Waxwork Exhibition, in the interest of home manufacture in connection with the printing trade'. 'The Trades' Association' in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, 8 Dec. 1870), p. 2. Actor, John Morrowes, sued D'Arc for breach of contract relating to his dismissal from voicing a part in *The Colleen Bawn Avenged* in 1871. 'The Lord Mayor's Court' in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, 30 Mar. 1871), p. 4.

[44] 'MONS. D'ARC'S ENTERTAINMENT' in *Saunders's Newsletter and Daily Advertiser* (Dublin, 1 Dec. 1870), p. 4.

placed him nearer to the Rotunda Rooms, but also among the lawyers and merchants of the city.[45]

Although based in Dublin from 1868 to 1872, D'Arc had an eye to the world beyond the Irish capital. He established a touring waxwork exhibition and marionette entertainment in Belfast in 1871.[46] Realising he could successfully replicate his Dublin operation from his home base, D'Arc brought his entertainments to other cities across Britain. His touring company moved directly from Belfast across Scotland between May and November 1871, staying two or three months at each location.[47] His plans included an even bigger tour, with advertisements for 'Several Parties who understand how to Work Marionettes cleverly' who would be willing to 'open in the Apollo Ball, Broadway, New York, in the month of April next, 1872'.[48] D'Arc's touring company performed in Liverpool in February 1872, attracting full houses and favourable press coverage, and likely remained in town for several months.

Despite resounding success, in March 1872, D'Arc advertised that he was 'willing to DISPOSE of, by Private Contract, his Celebrated MARIONETTE Exhibition, now at the QUEEN'S HALL, LIVERPOOL', explaining that 'Mons. D'Arc's only reason for relinquishing the Exhibition is that his Dublin Exhibition requires all his personal care and attention, and he is anxious to concentrate his capital in that concern.'[49] A later advertisement indicates that the lessee of the hall, W. J. Bullock, had purchased the Liverpool operation.[50] He developed the business into the well-known company, *Bullock's Royal Marionettes,* which even went on to tour America as D'Arc had planned.[51]

The reason for D'Arc's sudden sale of his successful touring company has been a source of puzzlement for many years.[52] The newly available archives of the Rotunda Hospital, owners of

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[45] Thom's Directory for 1870, 1871 and 1872 list Lambert D'Arc as the first resident (and most likely a tenant) of a newly built house at 53 Geraldine Street in what was then the northern outskirts of the city. The listing in the 1873 edition of Thom's shows the D'Arc's as the only family at 14 Upper Gloucester Street, where some neighbouring houses accommodated two and three families. Alex Thom, *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory* (1873).

[46] 'Music Hall, May Street, Belfast' in *Daily Examiner* (Belfast, 17 Feb. 1871), p. 2.

[47] For a detailed account of D'Arc's (and other) touring companies in Victorian Scotland, see John Phillips, 'Some Victorian Marionette Companies in Scotland 1860-1885' in *BrUNIMA Bulletin*, no. No 97 (1998), pp 4–7.

[48] The advertisements ran on the 2, 9 and 16 July: 'To Marionette Workers' in *Era* (London, 2 July 1871), p. 15.

[49] 'A Chance for Enterprising Speculators!' in *Era* (London, 17 Mar. 1872), p. 14.

[50] 'Queen's Hall - (Proprietor, Mr W. J. Bullock)' in *Era* (London, 21 Apr. 1872), p. 6.

[51] Phillips, 'The Origin and Progress of W.J. Bullock's Royal Marionettes'.
McCormick et al., *The Victorian Marionette Theatre*, p. 39.

[52] John Phillips, 'Bullock's Royal Marionettes' in *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts* (14 May 2023).

Dublin's Rotunda Rooms, sheds light on the matter. The minutes of the Rotunda's board of governors for 30 March 1872 note the receipt of 'a letter from Mons. D'Arc requesting the Governor to grant him some time longer to pay off his debts'.[53] Apparently, in his absence, either with or without his knowledge, payment for rent and gas was not being made for the Dublin business, resulting in an accumulating debt to the Rotunda Hospital.[54] Two advertisements, published alongside each other, in *The Era* shortly afterwards indicate the scale of the problem. One, from D'Arc, sought 'an entire new company for working the marionettes', offering 'permanent situations and liberal salaries'.[55] The other advertisement was from D'Arc's stage manager, Mr J. Shaw, seeking 'a couple of good figure workers' on behalf of his new employer, Fred Lawson in Banbridge, with the line 'N.B. – No further connection with Mons. D'Arc, Rotundo, Dublin'.[56]

Whatever the financial pressures, D'Arc's Dublin entertainments continued to receive positive press coverage throughout the summer of 1872, with the *Weekly Freeman's Journal* commenting that 'D'Arc's little theatre has been considerably improved'.[57] Another newspaper article referred to 'the many counter attractions in the way of public amusements at present in Dublin', which may indicate that the waxworks and marionette performances were losing audiences to other attractions.[58]

D'Arc may have had other debts, as he did not use the proceeds of the Liverpool enterprise to clear himself with the Rotunda. In August 1872, the board of governors summoned the showman to appear before them to address 'the large sum due by him and still accruing for hire of the Concert Room'.[59] D'Arc assured the board that 'he expected to be able in another week to resume and continue his weekly payments until the debt should be liquidated'. When D'Arc did not honour this agreement within a month, the governors instructed their solicitor 'to take immediate proceedings against Mons D'Arc for recovery of the rent due by him'.[60]

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[53] 'Volume seven of Minutes of hospital board, 1851 - 1877', p. 466 (Rotunda Hospital Archives, 1263/1/6, 1263/1/6).

[54] To add to D'Arc's professional difficulties, his four-year-old son, William, died of rubeola on 2 April 1872, just two days after the board of governors met to consider his proposal. 'Death of William D'Arc' (14 Upper Gloucester Street, Dublin, 2 Apr. 1872) (General Register Office: Irish Genealogy, reg ID: 3256489) (www.irishgenealogy.ie).

[55] 'Marionettes: Wanted, an Entire New Company for Working the Marionettes' in *Era* (London, 28 Apr. 1872), p. 15.

[56] 'Marionettes: Wanted, a Couple of Good Figure Workers' in *Era* (London, 28 Apr. 1872), p. 15.

[57] 'Mons. D'Arc's' in *Weekly Freeman and Irish Agriculturist* (Dublin, 11 May 1872), p. 7.

[58] 'Mons. D'Arc' in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, 29 Aug. 1872), p. 2.

[59] 'Volume seven of Minutes of hospital board, 1851 - 1877', p. 480.

[60] Ibid., p. 483.

However, not until a meeting of the board in February 1873 did the governors warn they would issue legal proceedings, 'unless he give his Bond & Warrant to secure said sum, in which case proceedings need not be taken'[61] The waxworks and marionette performances continued throughout this period despite, it would seem, any payment of rent. In the same month that the board of governors was threatening legal proceedings, the *Freeman's Journal* recorded that 'the Marionettes have this week completed their three thousandth performance in Dublin' but noted that 'the present will be Mons D'Arc's last season in Ireland'.[62] D'Arc's difficulties with his landlord do not appear to have been publicly known at the time, and the first line of the article - 'This clever entertainer is still in possession of the Exhibition Room of the Rotundo' – appears ironic given the circumstances.

Apparently, the French showman had no respite from financial pressures during this period. *The Irish Times* reports on a case taken in the Lord Mayor's court by a Mr Levenston, who had led the orchestra at D'Arc's entertainments at the Rotunda Rooms. The musician sought to 'recover £2 10s, which was alleged due as two weeks' wages, one of which he had been employed by the defendant, and the other which he claimed account wrongful dismissal.' D'Arc reported he had dismissed Levenston for absenting himself and that D'Arc's offer of £1 9s had been refused, but 'His Lordship made order for the £1 9s.'[63]

It seems that, despite the accumulating debt and threats of legal proceedings, the Rotunda's board of governors was slow in realising its resolution. However, at a meeting in May 1873, the board noted that D'Arc had still not paid any of the agreed weekly instalments and 'ordered that Mr Dix [solicitor] be instructed to take steps to obtain possession of the Rooms etc. now occupied by M. D'Arc, and to recover the amount due by him'.[64] A letter from the Rotunda's solicitor, dated 10 July 1873, records that 'M. D'Arc has this day executed agreement securing £202.1.2 mount due by him for rent and gas, by deposit of the marionette exhibition and has signed promissory notes for payment of said sum'.[65] The minutes of the August board meeting record that all of the waxworks had been removed from the Rotunda Rooms and the keys surrendered.[66] However, final payment was not made for a further twelve months: the

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[61] Ibid., p. 493.

[62] 'Mons. D'Arc's Entertainment' in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, 8 Feb. 1873), p. 2.

[63] 'Lord Mayor's Court' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 27 Mar. 1873), p. 5.

[64] 'Volume seven of Minutes of hospital board, 1851 - 1877', p. 500.

[65] Ibid., p. 504.

[66] Ibid., p. 507.

minutes of 10 July 1874, report that collection of the debt, with interest, was executed in England in the previous month.[67]

Against this backdrop of financial difficulty, D'Arc left Dublin for Chester, where he opened an exhibition on 9 August 1873. Advertisements carried the usual descriptions of his waxworks and cosmoramic views, but without mention of his marionette entertainments.[68] The marionettes remained in Dublin, held as security for his debt to the Rotunda board of governors. A news article in the *Cheshire Observer* noted that D'Arc's waxworks 'continued to be well patronised', but an adjacent article announcing the arrival of Bullock's Royal Marionettes and mentioning that 'The entertainment has been represented 400 times' in London venues would have been a difficult reminder of a missed opportunity for the showman.[69]

There is no mention of marionettes in D'Arc's subsequent visit to Newcastle in January 1874; his advertising copy describes the waxworks exhibition as 'the second to Madame Tussaud's' within which was re-introduced his chamber of horrors.[70] D'Arc's move to Liverpool, prompted an action against the London & North-Western Railway for damage to his waxworks in transit; he was awarded forty pounds in recompense.[71] D'Arc set up his waxwork exhibition in Manchester for the Christmas season of 1874 and remained for eight months before moving to Blackpool in the summer of 1875, returning to Manchester for the winter of 1876.[72]

Despite clearing his debts in Dublin and releasing his marionette theatre as security, D'Arc concentrated on exhibiting his waxworks and adding further innovations that might draw a larger audience. The Manchester exhibition included a series of 'tableaux vivants', where live models adopted static poses, which, as Richard Altick has pointed out 'represented the principle of the waxwork tableau turned inside out' as 'real human beings resembled waxen effigies'.[73] However, these static performances supplemented the wax figures with what Elena

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[67] Ibid., pp 529–530.

[68] 'Mons. D'Arc's Waxwork Exhibition' in *Cheshire Observer* (Cheshire, 9 Aug. 1873), p. 5.

[69] 'The Waxwork' in *Cheshire Observer* (Cheshire, 23 Aug. 1873), p. 5. 'The Music Hall' in *Cheshire Observer* (Cheshire, 23 Aug. 1873), p. 5.

[70] 'Circus Buildings, New Bridge Street' in *Newcastle Daily Journal* (Newcastle, 21 Jan. 1874), p. 1. 'Circus Buildings, New Bridge Street, Newcastle' in *Newcastle Daily Journal* (Newcastle, 9 Mar. 1874), p. 1.

[71] 'Court of Common Pleas, Westminister' in *Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, 25 Apr. 1874), p. 11.

[72] 'Greater Manchester Rate Books' (Manchester, Dec. 1876) (Greater Manchester County Record Office, M 9/40/2/345). D'Arc suffered another personal loss during his time at Blackpool, with the death, in October 1876, of his other son, Thomas, aged two. 'Deaths: D'Arc' in *Blackpool Herald* (Blackpool, 20 Oct. 1876), p. 5.

[73] Richard D. Altick, *The shows of London* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), p. 342.

Stevens describes as 'arresting intimacy'.[74] Female models typically wore flesh coloured body stockings and the overall tone of the tableaux vivants outraged Victorian moral purity organisations.[75]

The guardians of Manchester's moral purity responded to D'Arc's inclusion of human models by having him arrested for 'keeping and using a certain building… for a certain indecent show and exhibition'.[76] The subsequent court case included the prosecution of D'Arc, the models, exhibition assistants and members of the audience. D'Arc was fined twenty pounds or two-months imprisonment in default and the court ordered the removal and destruction of two wax figures. The other defendants were found guilty of variously participating in, aiding and abetting, or being present at, an indecent exhibition.[77] The case received wide newspaper coverage across Britain. As observed by *The Era*, D'Arc made the most of the publicity: 'MONS. D'ARC'S Waxworks and tableau vivants are, if we may judge from the announcements at the door, in full swing again, notwithstanding the police raid on Saturday evening last. The place was reopened to the public on Wednesday last and was the centre of curiosity after the publicity given to it by the recent prosecutions.'[78]

Unfortunately for D'Arc, being the centre of notoriety only drew further attention from the police. A week later, he again found himself before the court, charged with 'having kept those premises as a house of ill fame'. The prosecution contended that the models were accepting payment for immoral acts 'behind the scenes' of the exhibition.[79] In defending himself, D'Arc argued that his manager was responsible for this activity and he himself was innocent of the charges. He pointed out that had he been making the money as suggested, he would have been able to prevent the repossession of his premises for non-payment of rates. Ultimately, the magistrates sentenced D'Arc to four months hard labour and was committed to Manchester's Belle Vue Prison on 22 December 1876 for 'keeping a disorderly house'.[80] As

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[74] Elena Stevens, 'Striking an attitude: tableaux vivants in the British long nineteenth century' (PhD diss thesis, University of Southampton, 2017).

[75] Brenda Assael, 'Art or Indecency? Tableaux Vivants on the London Stage and the Failure of Late Victorian Moral Reform' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlv, no. 4 (2006), pp 744–758.

[76] 'Raid on Tableaux Vivants' in *Manchester Courier and Lancashire Advertiser* (Manchester, 5 Dec. 1876), p. 8.

[77] 'Manchester Police Court' in *Globe* (London, 5 Dec. 1876), p. 3.

[78] 'Mons. D'Arc's Waxworks and tableau vivants' in *Era* (London, 10 Dec. 1876), p. 9.

[79] 'Another Charge Against Lambert D'Arc' in *Manchester Evening News* (Manchester, 19 Dec. 1876), p. 3.

[80] 'The Charge Against Lambert D'Arc' in *Manchester Evening News* (Manchester, 22 Dec. 1876), p. 2. 'Manchester Prison Registers 1847-1881' (Belle Vue Prison, West Gorton, Manchester, Dec. 1876) (Prison Records, Manchester City Council, Register: 20034; Film: M600-1-1-16).

prisoner number 20034, his profession was recorded as 'artist' and his next-of-kin as his wife, Anne, with an address in Blackpool. He spent his fifty-fourth birthday incarcerated. He was released on 21 April 1877.[81]

D'Arc's incarceration did not form the entirety of his punishment. Within days of his commitment to prison, Manchester city rates officials announced the sale of his waxworks. Their advertisement addressed 'Capitalists, Showmen and others' and offered 'that splendid concern, known as MONS. D'ARC'S GRAND WAXWORK EXHIBITION' for sale by private treaty. Although D'Arc had not performed his marionette theatre since leaving Dublin in 1873, the sale was listed as 'including his World-famed Marionettes, &c'[82] The pain of losing his business was likely prolonged when it failed to sell by private treaty and was offered for auction as a single lot in January 1877. Even then, it did not reach a reserve price of two hundred pounds and the nearly five hundred waxworks figures and marionettes were eventually auctioned off as individual lots.[83]

There is no mention of D'Arc's exhibitions or performances in the five years after his release from prison. He spent much of this period in the anonymity of Hackney, London, where he described himself as a 'Modeller Man'.[84] D'Arc certainly spent some of that time recreating some of the waxwork figures that had been auctioned in Manchester. At Christmas 1882, D'Arc's waxworks exhibited at the Athenaeum Hall in Bristol, with an unusual mix of biblical themes - 'The Finding of Moses,' 'The Last Supper of our Lord,' 'The Birth of our Saviour,' - alongside a chamber of horrors exhibit.[85] The advertisements made no mention of the artist himself, merely referring to 'D'Arc's Waxwork Exhibition.[86]

By April 1884, D'Arc's advertisements suggest the business had reverted to the format from before his imprisonment.[87] Leaving his wife to manage the waxworks exhibition in Cardiff, D'Arc toured Belgium and France as *D'Arc's Fantoches Francais* with great success. *The Antwerp Journal*, in a detailed review, reported that 'Richness and splendour sum up the effect of all this display in silk and velvet materials…' and the 'small puppets move with such lively

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[81] 'Manchester Prison Registers 1847-1881'.

[82] 'To Capitalists, Showmen, and others' in *Era* (London, 31 Dec. 1876), p. 19.

[83] 'Sale of D'Arc's Waxworks Exhibition' in *Blackpool Herald* (Blackpool, 12 Jan. 1877), p. 5.

[84] Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, '1881 England Census: St John, Hackney, London' (Provo, UT, USA, 2004) (1881 England Census, piece 317, folio 6, page 5).

[85] 'D'Arc's Waxwork Exhibition - Athenaeum Hall' in *Western Daily Press* (Bristol, 23 Dec. 1882), p. 1.

[86] 'Athenaeum Hall' in *Western Daily Press* (Bristol, 6 Jan. 1883), p. 8.

[87] 'Victoria Rooms, St Mary Street, Cardiff' in *South Wales Daily News* (Cardiff, 5 Apr. 1884), p. 1.

agility, with such precision…'.[88] By the late 1880s D'Arc's marionettes had developed into a substantial touring company, prompting invitations to perform at the Paris Exhibition and to tour North America and South Africa.[89] The troupe performed in Kimberly, Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzbeurg and Johannesburg in 1890.[90] A tour of India followed in 1891; reviews noted that 'it required an effort to realise to one's self that the figures were not endowed with life and spontaneous motion'.[91] An Australian tour met with similarly favourable comments that mentioned 'the remarkable cleverness with which the fantoccini are manipulated'.[92]

Lambert and Anne D'Arc re-established their entertainment business and created a reputation far beyond that which had been so negatively impacted by his imprisonment in 1876. The next generation had already embraced the family trade: several of his children were accomplished marionette performers as well as having inherited much of their parents' business acumen. Lambert D'Arc's role in the dynasty ended unexpectedly with his death in Australia on 23 June 1893.[93] The family continued their 'great world tour', visiting Java, Hong Kong, China, Manilla and Japan as 'Madame D'Arc's Marionettes'.[94] They returned to where D'Arc's Marionettes were created, at Dublin's Rotunda Rooms, for Christmas 1895.[95]

D'Arc, by the time of his death, in his seventieth year, had achieved international success as a showman and entrepreneur. His wife and children continued to exhibit and perform for forty years after his passing. His legacy, as the founder of a dynasty of marionette companies and the origin of most of the successful marionette troupes of the era contrasts sharply with the fact that he never operated a puppet himself.

D'Arc's persistence, resilience and survival instincts demonstrate the extent to which Victorian showmen lived by their wits. Such entrepreneurs relied on extraordinary creativity, ingenuity and innovation to survive. His ability to garner publicity and to promote himself and his entertainments may not have been unusual for the period, but the extent to which he did so –

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[88] 'Mons. D'Arc's Grand Fantoches' in *Era* (London, 24 Oct. 1885), p. 22.

[89] Harry Wilding, 'A Marvellous Marionette Manipulator' in *World's Fair* (London, 1 Mar. 1919), p. 7. An account of legal proceedings taken by D'Arc against a promoter gave an idea of the scale of the touring company, which included 'ten manipulators and five tons of luggage': 'A Marionette Speculator' in *Era* (London, 9 June 1888), p. 16.

[90] 'D'Arc's Marionettes in Africa' in *Era* (London, 28 June 1890), p. 23.

[91] 'M. D'Arc's Marionettes at the Rink' in *Times of India* (Bombay, 24 Dec. 1891), p. 5.

[92] 'Uncommon Form of Amusement' in *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane, 8 Sept. 1892), p. 5.

[93] 'Death' in *South Wales Daily News* (Cardiff, 24 Aug. 1893), p. 4.

[94] John M. Blundall, 'The D'Arc Marionettes in Japan' in *BrUNIMA Bulletin*, no. 79 (1982), pp 8–9.

[95] 'At the Large Concert Room' in *Evening Telegraph* (Dublin, 21 Dec. 1895), p. 8.

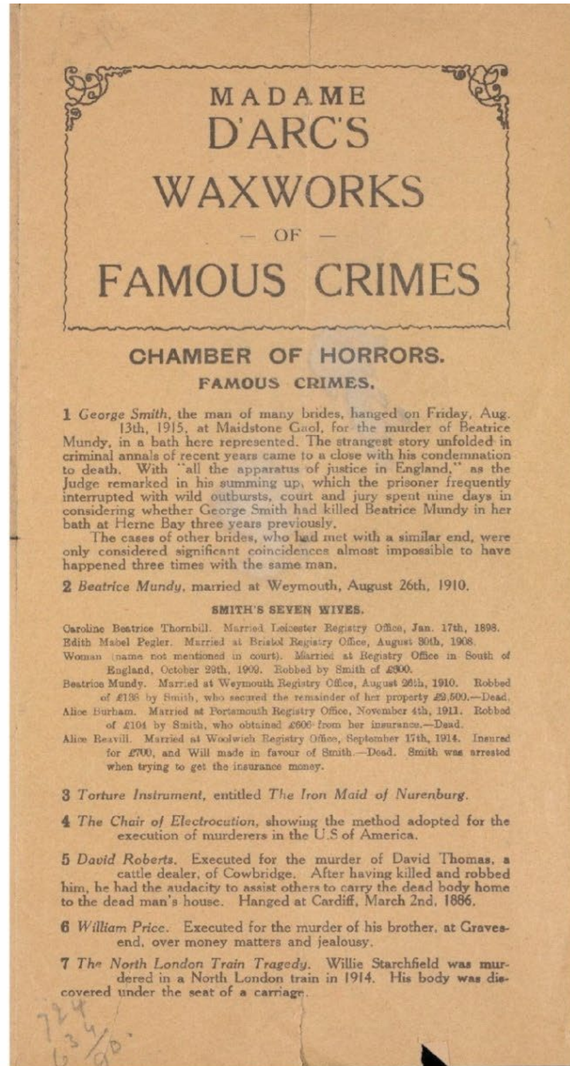
and to such great effect – is significant. However, his misjudgement in presenting a re-enactment of the hanging of the Manchester Martyrs in Dublin illustrates the limitations of popular entertainment to appeal to everyone and the importance of knowing the political values of different audiences. Similarly, his arrest for indecency shows his flawed assessment of how far he could push the boundaries of acceptable popular entertainment.

D'Arc used the courts and the Victorian legal system as tools to ensure his survival and success, alongside which he employed advertising and news coverage to present himself and his enterprise to the very best advantage. The extent to which he did both leaves us to consider whether these actions were the acceptable vagaries of a Victorian showman or the connivance of a nineteenth century charlatan.

3.3 Lambert D'Arc Illustrations

D'Arc's Waxworks:
Cover page of a programme for Madame D'Arc's Waxworks of Famous Crimes - circa 1900.

Reproduced courtesy of
The Victoria & Albert Museum.



MADAME
D'ARC'S
WAXWORKS
— OF —
FAMOUS CRIMES

CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

FAMOUS CRIMES.

1 *George Smith*, the man of many brides, hanged on Friday, Aug. 13th, 1915, at Maidstone Gaol, for the murder of Beatrice Mundy, in a bath here represented. The strangest story unfolded in criminal annals of recent years came to a close with his condemnation to death. With "all the apparatus of justice in England," as the Judge remarked in his summing up, which the prisoner frequently interrupted with wild outbursts, court and jury spent nine days in considering whether George Smith had killed Beatrice Mundy in her bath at Herne Bay three years previously.

The cases of other brides, who had met with a similar end, were only considered significant coincidences almost impossible to have happened three times with the same man.

2 *Beatrice Mundy*, married at Weymouth, August 26th, 1910.

SMITH'S SEVEN WIVES.

Caroline Beatrice Thornbill. Married Leicester Registry Office, Jan. 17th, 1898.
Edith Mabel Pegler. Married at Bristol Registry Office, August 30th, 1908.
Woman (name not mentioned in court). Married at Registry Office in South of England, October 29th, 1909. Robbed by Smith of £300.
Beatrice Mundy. Married at Weymouth Registry Office, August 26th, 1910. Robbed of £136 by Smith, who secured the remainder of her property £2,500.—Dead.
Alice Burham. Married at Portsmouth Registry Office, November 4th, 1911. Robbed of £104 by Smith, who obtained £606 from her insurance.—Dead.
Alice Reavill. Married at Woolwich Registry Office, September 17th, 1914. Insured for £700, and Will made in favour of Smith.—Dead. Smith was arrested when trying to get the insurance money.

3 *Torture Instrument*, entitled *The Iron Maid of Nurenburg*.

4 *The Chair of Electrocution*, showing the method adopted for the execution of murderers in the U.S of America.

5 *David Roberts*. Executed for the murder of David Thomas, a cattle dealer, of Cowbridge. After having killed and robbed him, he had the audacity to assist others to carry the dead body home to the dead man's house. Hanged at Cardiff, March 2nd, 1886.

6 *William Price*. Executed for the murder of his brother, at Gravesend, over money matters and jealousy.

7 *The North London Train Tragedy*. Willie Starchfield was murdered in a North London train in 1914. His body was discovered under the seat of a carriage.

D'Arc Marionettes:
A selecton of marionettes from the D'Arc company - circa 1880.

Reproduced courtesy of
The National Puppetry Archive (UK).

Chapter 4: Architect, Puppeteer and Innovator, Nelson Paine (1927-2001)

4.1 Introduction

Nelson Paine's establishment of the Dublin Marionette Group (DMG) mirrored a parallel international re-appraisal of the potential of the puppet theatre as a particular form of expression. The Irish puppet theatre provided an important vehicle for the influence of Modernism in the early twentieth century. Irish puppet performance provided an opportunity for innovation, experimentation and creativity that were at the heart of an international redefinition of artistic expression at that time.

Paine's work changed the perception of the puppet theatre itself. As had occurred in other parts of the world about that time, Paine presented the puppet theatre as a separate art form, rather than being merely a miniature replica of the human stage. This allowed him to consider various ways in which puppets could be used as a form of expression, instead of being limited by the constraints of the human stage.

The long-forgotten experimental approach by Paine and his circle made a considerable contribution to the development of the arts in Ireland. It provided the nucleus of experimental theatre in the Irish capital and influenced several well-known Irish creative artists over the decade of its existence and beyond. Furthermore, because of the involvement of a wide variety of actors, artists and dramatists of the period, experimentation within puppet performance had a ripple effect through those creative sectors. This prompted practitioners of a variety of art forms to question their default approaches and to innovate and experiment as they had experienced with their involvement with puppet theatre.

As Randal Stretch had done in the eighteenth-century Dublin and Lambert D'Arc in the nineteenth century, Nelson Paine demonstrated the suitability of puppet performance for adult audiences. Playing to full houses in the national theatre's "little sister" theatre and given some equivalence with other productions at the Wexford Opera Festival, Paine's puppet performances were accepted as just another form of cultural expression for an adult audience. This echoed the attitude of Dean Swift and his circle to the Irish puppet theatre of the eighteenth century.

Paine's work in creating the Nairobi Puppet Theatre and his return to Ireland to create the Puppet Opera Company is indicative of the way in which historical Irish puppet performance influenced and was influenced by the practice of the art form internationally. This is consistent with the way in which Frenchman, Lambert D'Arc, had previously established the most significant international touring Victorian marionette theatres while living in Dublin.

4.2 Nelson Paine, Experimental Theatre, and Puppetry in Ireland, 1942-1952.

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Despite Ireland's rich dramatic history, an international re-evaluation of one form of theatrical expression in the early twentieth century almost went un-noticed in Dublin. Across Europe and the United States, the puppet theatre was reconsidered as an art form in its own right, rather than a miniature expression of the human stage. Well-known figures from the world of theatre, opera, writing and performance espoused the puppet theatre as an independent art form and ideal medium for experimental expression. The English actor, director and theorist, Edward Gordon Craig, made the most significant re-appraisal of the concept of the puppet theatre; his 'influence can almost be said to have fathered the puppet theatre as a medium of mainstream theatre'.[1] In a series of books and essays about the theatre published throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Craig contended that the medium was primarily about performance, rather than being a derivative, or extension, of the literature that provided its scripts.[2] This focus on performance highlighted the role and function of the actor within the theatre. In a bid to consider the actor as a conduit to the audience, Craig proposed that the marionette was the ideal actor. As noted by Taxidou, 'The puppet is not only seen as the perfect substitute for the living actor (and particularly the actress), but as the ultimate work of art.'[3] This recognition of the puppet theatre as an art form radically altered the practice of puppetry. As noted by McCormick and Pratasik, 'art puppetry introduced a different set of social, cultural, ideological and aesthetic values. The puppeteer began to be perceived as an artist rather than a showman, and the puppet for what it was and not exclusively for what it might represent.'[4]

German poet and playwright, Paul Brann, frustrated by what he could not accomplish on the human stage, brought together a group of creative artists in 1906 to create the *Marionettentheater Münchner Künstler* (Marionette Theatre of Munich Artists). Puppet theatre historian, Henry Jurkowski described it as 'one of the most famous of all puppet theatres… which well represents the Modernist idea of 'art as artefact' and which greatly

[1] Francis, 'The Rise of the Puppeteer', p. 12.

[2] An overview of Craig's writings on the theatre, including his work on the puppet theatre can be found in J Michael Walton's *Craig on Theatre* (Walton 1983)

[3] Taxidou, 'A New "Art of the Theatre"', p. 795.

[4] McCormick & Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*, p. 208.

influenced the development of the European theatre'.[5] The German-Swiss painter and writer, Gunter Böhmer, underlined 'the possibilities of theatre specifically for puppets. These lie in the full exploitation of illusion and surrealist opportunities which are not available in the actors' theatre'.[6] Muscovite Sergei Obraztsov, is credited with having established puppetry as an art form in Russia. As Jurkowski and Francis observed, he 'attempted themes inaccessible to the flesh and blood actor.'[7] Paul McPharlin noted that Obraztov 'soon realized that puppets were not imitators of people, but instruments for showing up their foibles'.[8] Similar developments happened across Europe and the United States, where actors, poets and musicians created original content and provided their theatrical expertise for the puppet theatre. These included the establishment of the *Salzburger Marionetenetheater* in 1913[9] and the *Teatro dei Piccoli* in Rome in 1914.[10]

At this time Ireland was in the throes of its struggle for independence from Britain, but by the outbreak of the Second World War Ireland had asserted its independence, politically, economically and culturally. The war created an insular atmosphere that provided an environment for domestic drama and entertainment to thrive – without the distraction or competition of foreign companies or the loss of Irish performers to Britain. Building on an existing appetite for drama where, 'Dublin between 1920 and 1950 was an acutely theatre-conscious city',[11] the city became a 'home to a boom in professional theatre during the war years'.[12] While the Abbey Theatre continued to fulfil its role as the national theatre of the Irish Free State, it facilitated and encouraged alternative productions in its experimental theatre, the Peacock. [13] The Gate Theatre provided a modernist repertoire of productions that proved particularly successful in the period: 'During the war years, the Gate company took seasons in

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[5] Jurkowski & Francis, *A History of European Puppetry: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*, p. 76.

[6] Böhmer, *Puppets Through the Ages: an illustrated history*, p. 7.

[7] Francis, 'The Rise of the Puppeteer', p. 110.

[8] Paul McPharlin, *Puppetry 1941: An International Yearbook of Puppets and Marionettes* (Detroit, 1941), p. 7.

[9] Gottfried Kraus, *The Salzburg Marionette Theatre* (Salzburg, 1966), p. 32.

[10] McCormick, *The Italian Puppet Theater: A History*, p. 159.

[11] Brian Fallon, *An age of innocence: Irish culture 1930-1960* (Dublin, 1998), p. 137.

[12] Clair Wills, *That neutral island: a history of Ireland during the Second World War* (London, 2008), p. 306.

[13] The Abbey developed the Peacock Theatre as a venue for experimental theatre, finally realised in April 1937, when the students of the Abbey School of Acting presented two of their own productions as the *Abbey Experimental Theatre*. (Mooney 1937)

the much larger Gaiety Theatre, where several of its most successful productions were staged'.[14]

The restrictions of the war period – or *The Emergency* – in Ireland provided for a golden age for variety theatre with local stars given opportunities at home that they would not have previously enjoyed. The Theatre Royal, the Queen's and the Olympia Theatre provided a varied selection of song and dance, comedy, conjuring, acrobatics, juggling, opera and pantomime. Rebuilt in 1935, the Theatre Royal attracted vaudeville and film stars from Britain and the United States who performed to full houses, creating a reputation of as one of the four variety theatres in Britain and Ireland.[15] While the war caused the Royal to only present local talent, it continued to be 'the heart and soul of the bleak grey Dublin of the 1930s and 1940s'.[16] Ireland's amateur dramatics scene blossomed during the war. The growth of amateur companies prompted the formation of a national Amateur Dramatic Association in 1932. These companies were often incubators for those who would later become successful professional players and writers and provided an important source of income for professional playwrights. In addition, the growing number of amateur companies across the country provided a network of performance venues for touring companies.[17] As it was not dependent on financial success, amateur drama often allowed for greater experimentation. Those from outside mainstream theatre could innovate and experiment without the pressure of commercial priorities. Among those who engaged in such experimentation was one Nelson Paine. A Dublin-based architectural student, Paine noticed the resurgence of the puppet theatre abroad and observed how those in the creative and dramatic circles were using the puppet theatre far beyond its role as a form of popular entertainment. Paine would inspire a group of creative young people to harness 'the immense dramatic and artistic possibilities of the puppet'.[18] Paine introduced Modern Puppetry to Ireland and successfully presented the puppet theatre as an equal, alongside other dramatic and creative forms of expression. As outlined later in the article, Paine inspired others to develop creative and artistic careers on foot of their involvement with the Dublin Marionette Group and the Puppet Opera Company. No Irish puppet theatre had had an impact as great as Paine's since Randal Stretch's puppet theatre in

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[14] Fallon, *An age of innocence*, p. 144.

[15] C. Doyle, 'The Theatre Royal: Dublin' in Eamonn Jordan and Eric Weitz (eds), *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary Irish theatre and performance* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2018), p. 45.

[16] Ibid., p. 47.

[17] Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000*, pp 193–196.

[18] Joseph Holloway et al., '1942 Theatre Programme for the Dublin Marionette Group performances at the Peacock Theatre, 13-18 April 1942.' (National Library of Ireland, 1944 1880) (Theatre Programmes, Playbills and Posters from the Joseph Holloway Collection, 1880-1944.).

Capel Street caught the attention of Jonathan Swift in 1729.[19, 20] In 1942, Paine established the Dublin Marionette Group that became the nucleus of experimental theatre in the Irish capital. It attracted the involvement of actors, artists and dramatists of the period and performed in professional settings, including eight seasons at the Peacock Theatre and for each of the first four years of the Wexford Opera Festival. Focusing on press coverage of Paine's group, this article examines the context of the group's formation, its long-forgotten experimental approach, and its considerable contribution to the development of the arts in Ireland.

Dublin's Own Marionette Theatre

Before the war, Dublin's variety venues played host to visiting ventriloquists and puppet companies from Europe and the United States. In April 1942, *The Irish Times* reports on a new Dublin puppet theatre playing at the Peacock Theatre. The article references the world-famous Vittorio Podrecca's *Teatro dei Piccoli* puppet theatre, before advising readers that there were 'several places (no names, no libel actions) where one could spend a less profitable hour or so than at the Peacock'.[21] Nelson Paine's Dublin Marionette Group's debut at the Peacock Theatre was an impressive way for an amateur theatrical company to introduce themselves to the public. The statement of intent published in the programme for those first six performances demonstrated that this was part of an international reappraisal of the puppet theatre and that they intended pursuing the creative potential of the medium that was evident in other countries over the previous twenty years:

> Dublin has remained strangely indifferent to the great renaissance of the art of the Puppet which has taken place during the past twenty years in other countries. THE DUBLIN MARIONETTE GROUP has been formed with the purpose of examining some aspects of the immense dramatic and artistic possibilities of the Puppet.[22]

The programme dispelled any notion that puppetry was only a form of popular entertainment for children and included an adaptation of Ivan Sastropetrovitch's *Vampire*, and A. P. Herbert's *Two Gentlemen of Soho*, with an interlude of *Senor Vermicelli* on piano. An *Irish Press* review was encouraging of the fledging company, reporting that 'The marionettes were all attractively

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[19] Martin Molony, '"Oh, This is more of Stretch's Show": Randal Stretch and Puppet Theatre in Eighteenth-Century Ireland.' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an Dá Chultúr*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2022), p. 107.

[20] Nelson Paine moved to Spain in 1965 and died in Cádiz in 2001.

[21] Lir O'Connor, 'An Irishman's Diary: Podrecca's Puppets; Puppetry in Dublin' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 15 Apr. 1942), p. 2.

[22] Holloway et al., '1942 Theatre Programme for the Dublin Marionette Group performances at the Peacock Theatre, 13-18 April 1942.'

dressed and, on the whole, this is a courageous and enterprising experiment that should be welcomed.'[23] The international puppetry circle noted the Dublin initiative when the puppetry section of the *World's Fair* entertainment trade newspaper reproduced an *Irish Press* review shortly after.[24] This embryonic theatre group had a single driving force behind its creation. The programme for the evening lists Nelson Paine as Producer, having made the puppets and as one of the manipulators.[25] The accounts ledger for the Peacock Theatre indicates that the rental of the theatre – for £10, paid in advance – was in Nelson Paine's own name, rather than that of the group.[26] Born in Glasgow in 1923, (Charles) Nelson Paine was the son of English artist Charles Paine and Maria Nelson, a native of Hollywood, Co Down. His parents separated in 1930 and Nelson and his mother moved to Dun Laoghaire that summer. Having completed his Leaving Certificate at Sandford Park School, he studied Modern Languages at UCD for a year before taking up an apprenticeship as an Architect in 1941.[27]

Paine's interest in the theatre and performance from that time is evident from his involvement with the Glenageary Players when he performed in a production of Lionel Brown's *Square Pegs*, produced by his cousin, Havelock Nelson, in the Peacock Theatre in February 1941.[28] He appeared again with this amateur drama group in 'two entertaining dramatic pieces' in November of that year.[29] Paine's interest in performance included music. He was 'very highly commended' for his flute performance in the Feis Ceoil in May 1941[30] and noted again in December 1942, when he 'contributed a flute solo' to a concert presented by the Students' Musical Union of the Royal Irish Academy of Music.[31] Nelson Paine described himself as an artist in the college student register of the National Irish Visual Arts Library in October 1941 suggesting a possible interest in the creative visual world of his father, Charles.[32]

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[23] 'Marionette Play' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 16 Apr. 1942), p. 3.

[24] Gerald Morice, 'Marionette Plays in Dublin' in *The World's Fair* (Oldham, 2 May 1942), sec. Punch and Puppetry Pars, p. 5.

[25] Holloway et al., '1942 Theatre Programme for the Dublin Marionette Group performances at the Peacock Theatre, 13-18 April 1942.'

[26] 'Peacock Theatre Ledger 1931-1951' (Dublin), p. 71 (Abbey Theatre Archives).

[27] 'Department of Justice Naturalisation File for Charles Nelson Paine' (Dublin) (National Archives of Ireland, JUS/2013/50/991).

[28] 'Peacock Theatre: Square Pegs' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 6 Feb. 1941), p. 7.

[29] 'Glenageary Players' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 18 Nov. 1941), p. 4.

[30] 'Feis Ceoil Winners' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 16 May 1941), p. 5.

[31] 'R.I.A.M. Concert' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 22 Dec. 1942).

[32] 'College Student Register of the National Irish Visual Arts Library' (Dublin, 13 Oct. 1941) (National Irish Visual Arts Library Archives, IE-NIVAL CR-CR67-1355).

The Dublin Marionette Group again featured in the *World's Fair Punch & Puppetry Pars* column in April 1943. The article describes great enthusiasm for a new 'Free State puppet company', with more than twenty members, which was 'permanently housed in the residence of the President of the ensemble, Mr Nelson Paine'. Performances comprised 'short plays and turns', using twenty-inch marionettes.[33] An *Irish Times* article, of December 1943, announced a second series of performances for the group at the Peacock Theatre with a Nativity play.[34] An article in *The Irish Press* described the initiative as 'a new departure in the Irish theatre' and encouraged the experimental nature of the production: 'Experiment, the life blood of life, is also the life blood of the theatre'.[35] A subsequent *Irish Press* front-page review of the production was positive about 'a most interesting experiment', highlighting the distinct nature of the puppet theatre.[36] There was similar encouragement in subsequent coverage of the potential of the puppet theatre, based on the efforts of the Dublin Marionette Group, suggesting that it 'revealed a genuine and sincere approach to theatre progression'.[37] A letter from the DMG Secretary, Liam Proud, to the *Roddy the Rover* column in *The Irish Press* in March 1944, tells us that the group has grown to 32 members, who can have up to 12 puppets on stage at any one time. Proud indicated that the group intended to broaden the scope of their productions and were shortly to use glove puppets in a production in French for the Dublin French Society the following week. He also wrote of plans for a play in the Irish language, while arrangements were in place to present some 25 marionette characters in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* at the Engineers' Hall later that month.[38]

The Irish Press gives a brief mention to the arrangements for the production a few days later: 'Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, long a classical theme for puppets, will be produced in Dublin on Tuesday by the Dublin Marionette Group'.[39] An *Irish Times* advertisement – the group's first paid notice – announces: 'Dublin Marionette Group present Marlowe's Dr Faustus at the Engineers' Hall Dawson Street for three nights (28, 29, 30) at 7:45pm with booking at Gills'.[40] The same newspaper gave a relatively positive review of the *Dr Faustus* production, suggesting that the puppetry had some way to go to match the quality of other aspects of the

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[33] Gerald Morice, 'New Dublin Marionette Group' in *The World's Fair* (Oldham, 24 Apr. 1943), sec. Punch and Puppetry Pars4, p. 4.

[34] 'Marionette Group Play' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 17 Dec. 1943), p. 2.

[35] Terence Ward, 'Christmas Shows' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 24 Dec. 1943), p. 3.

[36] Terence Ward, 'Nativity Play in Miniature' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 21 Dec. 1943), p. 1.

[37] Terence Ward, 'Pantomime Puppets Protest' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 18 Dec. 1943), p. 5.

[38] 'Roddy the Rover' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 9 Mar. 1944), p. 2.

[39] Terence Ward, 'Country Curtain' in *Irish Press*, 25 Mar. 1944, p. 2.

[40] 'Dublin Marionette Group present Marlowe's Dr Faustus' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 28 Mar. 1944), p. 3.

performance: 'The movement of the puppets is still a little stilted, but no possible complaint could be made about the quality of the speakers' voices. With very few exceptions, indeed, all these young people have had no practical stage experience; yet they can speak a line with all the assurance of professional actors'.[41] Public interest in this innovative theatre was such that Quidnunc's *Irishman's Diary*, in *The Irish Times*, brought readers behind the scenes to give a sense of the organisation and coordination between those who were manipulating the figures and those providing the voices:

> Underneath the stage, bent double, with his eye on the mirror which shows him the action on the stage, sits a reader, supported by pillows. From time to time he is joined by other readers, who creep in between the uprights.
> Six feet above the floor is the operators' platform. From here, three girls in slacks work the puppets. When their puppet speaks angrily – from beneath the stage – the girls frown in sympathy. When the audience murmurs at an apt gesture, the girls look at one another and laugh. It is nice team-work.[42]

News of the group's success was covered in an article in *The World's Fair* that referred to *Dr Faustus* as 'its most elaborate production to date'. Bearing in mind that Gerald Morice was writing in a British newspaper for the entertainment trade, his appreciation for the group's achievements is significant: 'Great credit is due to this group for their courage in tackling the task, which by all accounts I have received, went off very well'.[43]

Although the Dublin Marionette Group productions played almost exclusively for an adult audience and focused on the potential of puppetry as an independent artistic art, they did occasionally perform for children. One instance was in in April 1944, when, under the auspices of *Amharclann na nOg* (The Children's Theatre Guild), the group performed in Clontarf.[44] The event allowed the group to perform in Irish for the first time, presenting 'a traditional puppetry piece translated into Irish'.[45] The group repeated the Irish language performance in Rathmines in October 1944.[46]

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[41] 'Marionette Group Stage Show' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 29 Mar. 1944), p. 3.

[42] Quidnunc, 'Puppet Puzzle' in *Irish Times*, 31 Mar. 1944, sec. An Irishman's Diary, p. 3.

[43] Gerald Morice, 'Faust with Dublin Puppets' in *The World's Fair* (Oldham, 22 Apr. 1944), sec. Punch and Puppetry Pars, p. 5.

[44] 'Marionette Display' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, 28 Apr. 1944), p. 2.

[45] A. O M., 'Children's Guild Brings Theatre to School' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 1 May 1944), p. 1.

[46] A. O M., 'Plays for Children' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 9 Oct. 1944), p. 3.

Returning to the Peacock Theatre – and to adult audiences – the Dublin Marionette Group presented Synge's *Riders to the Sea* as one of three pieces at the venue in November 1944. An article in *The Irish Press* advised readers that 'Something that should be seen particularly next week is the Dublin Marionette Group at the Peacock Theatre'.[47, 48] A subsequent *Irish Press* review was very positive and made the connection with Gordon Craig's theories of the theatre. 'Something rather exciting happened at the Peacock Theatre last night; almost casually, a new dramatic medium was suddenly put before the public without blast of trumpets or other media of advertising.' The reviewer went on to observe '…last night's presentations gave a clear idea of the potentialities of the puppet medium and the progress in its technique which this group has made', finally advising 'No one interested in theatrical development should miss this show, which continues to-night and to-morrow'.[49]

A review in *The Irish Independent*, while supportive of the company, criticised them for 'attempting plays not very suitable for their art'.[50] Referring to Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, as 'a definitely bad selection', the reviewer explained why: 'One wants poets rather than puppet manipulators to speak this gloomy little masterpiece by Synge and why do it with puppets!' The review criticises the other performance of the evening for other reasons: '*Revelations at Low Tide* I thought too ambitious. This satire by Brian Boydell is so difficult to follow that one has no attention to spare for the puppets'.[51] Brian Boydell responded to this criticism in his memoir, published in 2018: 'Most of the critics failed to find any meaning or sense in my play. I didn't intend that there should be any logic or sense in what was just a dreamlike surrealist evocation of a disturbing mood-picture'.[52] Alongside Dublin's theatre critics, the entertainment trade newspaper, *World's Fair*, expressed excitement about the way in which the group innovated in their use of puppetry for these performances, describing it as:

> … a masterpiece in puppetry – done on the new style adopted by the Russian manipulator, Obrazov. The puppet head is very large and is held up by one hand, whilst the operator's other hand is inserted in a sleeve and projects from the wrist as a

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[47] 'In the Theatres' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 11 Nov. 1944), p. 3.

[48] A newspaper advertisement indicates a four night run, Wednesday to Saturday inclusive, starting at 7:30pm (*Evening Herald* 1944)

[49] Terence Ward, 'Marionette Group at Peacock' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 16 Nov. 1944), p. 3.

[50] D. S., 'Puppet Show at Peacock' in *Irish Independent* (Dublin, 16 Nov. 1944), p. 3.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Brian Boydell, *Rebellious ferment: a Dublin musical memoir and diary* (Cork, 2018), p. 78.

> puppet's hand. This gives terrific scope for puppet movement. There is nothing the puppet cannot do, from sawing wood to painting a picture.[53]

Whether the theatre reviews were positive or negative for the puppet company, it is significant that the performances were reviewed in the usual way – as dramatic productions for the professional stage. Such ongoing critique demonstrated that Dublin was treating the puppet theatre as a serious form of creative expression beyond that which had been previously considered as popular entertainment. In this, Nelson Paine succeeded in getting Irish theatre audiences to recognise the puppet theatre as a serious form of creative expression – mirroring the earlier international reappraisal of the medium.

New Role and New Medium

In 1945 Nelson Paine and his puppeteers collaborated with the Irish Red Cross in another use of their performance skills. As noted in an article in *The Irish Press,* 'The Dublin Marionette Group, pioneers of the Puppet Theatre in Dublin, are attracting big audiences to the Mansion House for their show in connection with the Irish Red Cross Week'.[54] *The World's Fair* later states that the group 'provided propaganda playlets in the Anti-Tuberculosis Exhibition held in the Irish Free State capital from May 26 to June 16' and that the event attracted an attendance of over 28,000, for whom the Dublin Marionette Group used 'glove puppets in the Russian style'.[55] The group gave three performances of one of four different plays each day. Each play featured a villain, 'the Demon Bacillus Tuberculosis who endeavoured to spread infection by every possible means.' An interesting development mentioned in *The World's Fair* article was that the Irish Film Society made a film of one of the plays, which was later used for further promotion to prevent the spread of TB.

The end of the Second World War seems to have distracted those involved in the Dublin Marionette Group for a time, with no further public performances until October 1947, when newspaper advertisements announced the return of the Dublin Marionette Group to the Peacock Theatre. The programme was a selection of plays and ballads to run for six nights, at 7:45pm each day for an admission of two shillings.[56] Further details of these performances in an *Irish Press* article indicates the breadth of material performed, including a translation of a

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[53] Gerald Morice, 'Dublin Puppet Group Programme' in *The World's Fair* (Oldham, 2 Dec. 1944), sec. Punch and Puppetry Pars, p. 5.

[54] Terence Ward, 'Theatre' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 11 June 1945), p. 3.

[55] Gerald Morice, 'Puppets Aid Anti-Tuberculosis Campaign' in *The World's Fair* (Oldham, 11 Aug. 1945), sec. Punch and Puppetry Pars, p. 5.

[56] '1947 Peacock Theatre advertisement' in *Irish Times*, 25 Oct. 1947, p. 7.

fifteenth-century French farce, excerpts from Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, the American *Frankie and Johnnie* and the Irish *The Women are Worse than the Men*. The *Irish Press* article includes news of innovation by the puppet company: 'The group claims to have been developing a new type of puppet, which, they believe, has never been used anywhere else. This is really big news for followers of the puppet stage because this puppet they have developed is more expressive than any of the types which they have previously used'.[57]

Such references to a more expressive form of puppetry may relate to the use of rods to manipulate the puppet arms or to the use of Catalan-style puppets, which were larger than typical glove puppets, but uniquely manipulated with all five fingers.[58] Although the group had used hand puppets in some previous productions, these had limited expression. This innovation provided a greater stage presence for the figure and gave more flexibility in movement. Those who adopted the puppet theatre as a new form of creative expression in this period did not allow themselves to be restricted by the custom and practice of particular kinds of puppetry and took more easily to new methods of expression. The *Evening Herald* also encouraged audiences to support the group's return to the Peacock. It acknowledged their innovative approach in a review headlined 'Pioneers in Puppetry' in which it declared that 'if only for the reason that they are pioneers in a form of dramatic expression almost entirely new to use, the Dublin Marionette Group is worthy of patronage at the Peacock this week…'.[59]

An article in *World's Fair* reported the group playing to full houses for their 1947 run in the Peacock and gave an indication of the complexity of the production and signs of further innovation from the puppet company. The article noted, 'the puppet stage was a three-level construction of which the producer in each instance took full advantage'. It also recorded 'another cleaver piece of stagecraft was displayed in the introduction of a puppet compere to address the audience from an open panel on the O. P. side of the proscenium and to announce each item with appropriate comments'.[60] The 1947 performances at the Peacock were the first since international travel resumed at the end of the war, allowing the return of international variety acts to Dublin venues. The Dublin Marionette Group no longer had exclusivity with audiences interested in puppet theatre but appeared to hold their own. Harry Lynton's

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[57] Tony Molloy, 'Theatre' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, 27 Oct. 1947), p. 8.

[58] H. V. Tozer, 'The Puppet Theatre in Barcelona' in *Puppetry 1932: A Yearbook of Puppets & Marionettes* (Detroit, 1932), p. 25.

[59] 'Pioneers in Puppetry' in *Evening Herald*, 29 Oct. 1947, p. 2.

[60] Gerald Morice, 'Dublin Puppetry' in *The World's Fair* (Oldham, 20 Dec. 1947), sec. Punch and Puppetry Pars, p. 5.

marionettes played at the Queen's Theatre[61] in the week following the DMG's run at the Peacock and Delvaine's Marionettes performed at the Olympia a week after that.[62]

The successful run at the Peacock emboldened the DMG. A report, in the *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, of its annual general meeting in November 1947 mentions ambitious plans for future programmes and cautions readers that their work 'bears about the same relationship to Punch-and-Judy as does Shakespeare to Jack-and-the-Beanstalk'.[63] The Dublin Marionette Group continued to perform at The Peacock Theatre for several days each year from 1947 to 1951, performing a wide range of productions, including opera and Irish ballad pieces. They played to a full house at the Peacock as Dublin audiences continued to support them, despite competition from a range of international theatre and variety acts available at Dublin venues since the end of the war. The group used their run at the Peacock in 1948 to concentrate on presenting a single full-length play, *Treasure Island*, but drew criticism for a lack of flexibility of movement in the manipulation of the puppets.[64] Another review questioned whether 'the particular type of glove puppet used by the Dublin Group, restricted as it is in movement and expression, can sustain audience interest for the duration of a full-length play'.[65]

In January 1949, the group met with more favour from the critics. Their production of *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (supported by two shorter pieces), was described by *The Irish Times* as being 'as good an evening's entertainment as Dublin is offering at the moment'.[66] *The Irish Press* were equally enthusiastic: 'This group is really settling down and evolving a tradition which, considering their limitation in not having a theatre of their own, is a big achievement'.[67] Nelson Paine expressed an ambition to have a permanent puppet theatre in Dublin and to establish puppet groups in rural areas.[68]

The 1950 performances at the Peacock included a glove-puppet version of George Bernard Shaw's *Shakes versus Shav* - a puppet play written in the previous year that was to be Shaw's last dramatic work. Commissioned by the Lanchester Marionettes, the play features Shaw and Shakespeare as puppets, with the latter seeking his revenge on Shaw for appropriating his work. Shaw's preface to the play revealed his particular understanding of puppetry as a

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[61] 'Harry Lynton Presents his Marionettes in Carefree' in *Evening Herald* (Dublin, 8 Nov. 1947), p. 4.
[62] 'Olympia Tonight' in *Irish Independent* (Dublin, 18 Nov. 1947), p. 4.
[63] 'Puppets in the Limelight' in *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 22 Nov. 1947, p. 11.
[64] 'Stevenson Classic in Puppetry' in *Irish Independent*, 9 Mar. 1948, p. 6.
[65] 'Treasure Island - Dublin Marionette Group' in *Irish Times*, 9 Mar. 1948, p. 4.
[66] 'Dublin Marionette Group' in *Irish Times*, 4 Jan. 1949, p. 3.
[67] T M, 'Marionette Group's New Advance' in *Irish Press*, 4 Jan. 1949, p. 9.
[68] 'Founder's Ambition' in *Irish Independent*, 5 Jan. 1949, p. 5.

creative art form – rather than as a simulation of the human stage – and he cautioned its practitioners on the development of the art form: 'I can imagine the puppets simulating living performers so perfectly that the spectators will be completely illuded. The result would be the death of puppetry: for it would lose its charm with its magic. So let reformers beware.'.[69] Reviews of the 1950 productions were supportive of the amateur group's work but assessed the performances as they would a professional offering. Shaw's puppet play was warmly received by *The Irish Press*: 'Shaw's Play Rousing Knock-Out… It was a most enjoyable little frolic'[70] while *The Irish Times* suggested, 'this production is the best that I have seen the Group stage and deserves the full house that it will obviously command'.[71] *The Irish Independent* cautioned on the limitations of the puppet theatre, while a review described the performance of Ravel's L'Enfant et les Sortileges as 'an ambitious venture, but the result was an undoubted triumph for the Group as a whole'.[72] A former member of their troupe, composer Brian Boydell, was in the audience for one of their 1950 Peacock performances. He later recorded his impression in his diary, when he referred to the Ravel piece as '…definitely the best thing they have done'.[73] The 1950 performances were the last to be orchestrated by the group's founder, Nelson Paine. Paine moved to England in the early part of 1949, returning to Dublin in December 1949 for the final preparations of the DMG's run at The Peacock, before leaving for Kenya to work as a town planner in Nairobi, where he subsequently established the Nairobi Puppet Theatre. In Paine's absence, David Rowlands led the Dublin Marionette Group to some success.[74] In November 1951, the group performed a puppet opera, *Dream of a Naughty Boy* - an anglicised version of Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortileges* - at the first Wexford Opera Festival in November 1951,[75] where they also performed *Shakes vs Shav* and three short sketches.[76] The group returned for the second year of the festival to repeat the Ravel production and Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* .[77]

Conclusion and Appraisal

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[69] Bernard Shaw, *SHAKES versus SHAV: A Puppet Play by Bernard Shaw* (Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, 1949), p. 5.

[70] 'Shaw's Play Rousing Knock-Out' in *Irish Press*, 21 Mar. 1950, p. 5.

[71] 'Ravel With Puppets' in *Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1950, p. 5.

[72] 'Peacock Presentation: Limitations of Puppetry' in *Irish Independent*, 21 Mar. 1950, p. 7.

[73] Boydell, *Rebellious ferment*, p. 169.

[74] Quidnunc, 'An Irishman's Diary: Puppet Cuchullain' in *Irish Times*, 14 Dec. 1950, p. 5.

[75] 'Wexford's Ambitious Festival' in *Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 1951, p. 5.

[76] 'Wexford's Festival of the Arts Gives National Lead' in *Irish Independent*, 22 Oct. 1951, p. 7.

[77] 'Wexford Begins Eight Day Festival' in *Irish Independent*, 27 Oct. 1952, p. 7.

In the ten years of its existence, the Dublin Marionette Group used a variety of forms of puppetry for a wide range of productions. Commentary and dramatic criticism of their performances indicate experimentation and innovation in both their choice of production and the puppetry used to accomplish it. Theatrical reviews of their performances varied from high praise to damning criticism. However, it is significant that the theatre critics of the day reviewed these amateur puppeteers by the standards of professional human performances. The group had succeeded in having the puppet theatre regarded as a creative form of expression to be valued alongside other dramatic forms and not just for popular entertainment. Professional publications such as *World's Fair* and annual editions of *Puppetry Yearbook* followed the work of the group alongside news of the most successful professional puppet theatres of the period.

Having established the Nairobi Puppet Theatre in Kenya, Nelson Paine returned to Dublin in 1954 to set up the *Puppet Opera Company,* which brought operatic performances to parts of Ireland where people were unlikely to have otherwise experienced opera.[78] The company presented five operas and a production of *Alice in Wonderland*, including performances at the 1954 and 1955 Wexford Opera Festival.[79] After twenty months and 18,000 miles of 'trundling around Ireland in their three-wheeled van',[80] Nelson Paine left in 1956 to return to Kenya and to the Nairobi Puppet Theatre, where he established its own venue, staging several productions each year.

Nelson Paine attracted a range of Irish artistic and dramatic talent to bring Modern Puppetry to Ireland. A perusal of a list of those associated with this amateur group from 1942 to 1952 underlines the extent of the talent available for their productions. This skilled group of individuals adopted the puppet theatre as a new form of creative expression – paralleling what had happened across Europe and the United States over the previous two decades. It also suggests that the Dublin Marionette Group may have been somewhat of a breeding ground for future artistic success.

[78] 'Provinces will see Puppet Opera' in *Irish Independent*, 29 Apr. 1954, p. 4.

[79] Candida, 'An Irishwoman's Diary: Travel Adventures' in *Irish Times*, 30 Sept. 1955.

[80] Quidnunc, 'An Irishman's Diary: Swan Song' in *Irish Times*, 10 May 1956, p. 8.

The programmes of the 1942[81] and 1944[82] Dublin Marionette Group performances at the Peacock and a similar programme for the Puppet Opera Company's performance of La Boheme in 1954[83] provide an interesting list of those involved. Amongst them are several young men and women who would go on to become well-known artists, dramatists and musicians. Brian Boydell provided incidental music and read speaking parts, before writing and producing 'Revelation at Low Tide' for the group in 1944.[84] He was to go on to become 'one of the most important figures in 20th Century Irish music'.[85] As a teenage assistant to Paine's Puppet Opera Company in 1955, John McCormick started a life-long passion for drama and the puppet theatre. He became founding director of Ireland's first university Drama Department in Trinity College and authored five books and numerous articles on the history and development of puppetry. Many other young people who worked with Nelson Paine's puppet productions developed careers in the theatre or in artistic and creative fields. Several became well-known artists, including Liam Proud (1920 - 1995), George Burton Wallace (1920 - 2009) and Barbara Warren (1925 – 2017).

Nelson Paine's eagerness to innovate and experiment with puppets achieved a reappraisal of the puppet theatre as an art form in early twentieth century Ireland. Having watched the adoption of the puppet theatre as a valued form of theatrical expression across Europe and the United States, Paine inspired others to join him in a theatrical adventure to discover its potential first-hand. He successfully repositioned the puppet theatre from being a form of popular entertainment aimed at children to being a valued form of theatrical expression that was capable of unique creativity.

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[81] Holloway et al., '1942 Theatre Programme for the Dublin Marionette Group performances at the Peacock Theatre, 13-18 April 1942.'

[82] Joseph Holloway et al., '1944 Theatre Programme for the Dublin Marionette Group performances at the Peacock Theatre, 15-17 Nov 1944.' (National Library of Ireland, 1944 1880) (Theatre Programmes, Playbills and Posters from the Joseph Holloway Collection, 1880-1944.).

[83] James Plunkett, '1954 Theatre Programme for the Dublin Marionette Group performances of La Boheme in September 1954' (National Library of Ireland, 2003 1920) (Papers of James Plunkett, MS 40,789).

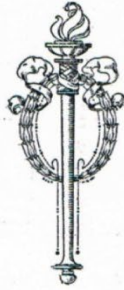
[84] Boydell, *Rebellious ferment*, p. 78.

[85] Martin Adams, 'Composer Brian Boydell dies in Dublin aged 83' in *Irish Times*, 9 Nov. 2000, p. 3.

4.3 Nelson Paine Illustrations

THE DUBLIN MARIONETTE GROUP

PROGRAMME



PEACOCK THEATRE

COMMENCING WEDNESDAY, 15th APRIL, 1942

FOR FOUR DAYS

The Talbot Press, Printers, Dublin.

Dublin Marionette Group programme from their 1942 performance at Dublin's Peacock Theatre.

Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

THE DUBLIN MARIONETTE GROUP

Presents

(*1*) **VAMPIRE**

Adapted from the original of

IVAN SASTROPETROVITCH

Characters:

CHRISTOPHER SUMMERS, M.D.
ANNE
PERCIVAL (*her brother*)

IN FIVE SCENES

INTERVAL

(*2*) SENOR VERMICELLI .... *Pianist*

(*3*) TWO GENTLEMEN OF SOHO

BY

A. P. HERBERT

A One Act Play
Production by Nelson Paine

Characters:

TOPSY, PLUM, LADY LAETITIA, LORD WITHERS, HUBERT, DUCHESS, SNEAK, A WAITER

~~~*~~~

Manipulators:

MARY McNEILL, JOAN ROBINSON, LIAM PROUD, JEAN HANAGHAN, NELSON PAINE, ROBIN NELSON

Voices:

JOAN ROBINSON, RAYMOND ACTON, DAVID ROWLANDS, JEAN HANAGHAN, CHARLTON SHAW, ROBIN NELSON

Puppets made by Nelson Paine
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Chapter 5: Actor, Puppeteer and Ventriloquist, Eugene Lambert (1928-2010)

5.1 Introduction

This article examines how the innovative use of puppetry in early Irish television children's programming belied the concerns of much of Irish society who regarded the advent of Irish television as a threat to Irish culture and a potentially negative influence on Irish children.

As with many of those who had worked in live adult cabaret and / or children's entertainment, Eugene Lambert was keen to embrace the opportunities provided by Ireland's new television service. However, unlike most of his professional colleagues, puppetry provided Lambert with a range of ways in which he could engage with a television audience and a range of television audiences with which to do so. While his radio programme was an easy transition to an audio version of his ventriloquist act, the breadth and versatility of puppetry provided several possible opportunities – including some of which Lambert had no direct experience, but which proved quite successful.

Just as other puppeteers had done before them, the *Wanderly Wagon* production team responded to new challenges and opportunities in an innovative way. Transitioning from a theatrical presentation of puppets to that for television could have been limited to filming the static perspective of the proscenium arch, as it was with Lambert's initial productions of stories by Patricia Lynch. However, incorporating human and puppet characters alongside one another as a form of drama completely changed the nature of performance and demonstrates the versatility and potential of the art form.

Lambert's description of using 'a flash gun for making puffs of smoke' and other work-around approaches to the limited budget of the fledgling television service indicates the extent to which innovation was the order of the day. However, while Telefís Éireann would have had some understanding of the requirements of musicians and singers, puppetry would not have been taken as seriously. Although there is an irony that it was a puppet production – *Brógeen Follows the Magic Tune* – that was the first international sale of a home-produced drama series, it is an example of how puppet performance has been undervalued throughout Ireland's cultural history.

Financial considerations have always been at the heart of puppet theatre – either as a restriction on the resources available or as a motivating factor in creating puppet performances. Puppetry provided a relatively cheap form of dramatic entertainment in the first 25 years of Irish television, allowing the service to enjoy a much higher proportion of home-produced programming than would otherwise have been the case. As Randal Stretch's

eighteenth-century Capel Street puppet theatre required no green room for its actors, there was a distinct financial advantage in the use of puppetry within Ireland's television programming.

The Eugene Lambert case study illustrates the breadth of puppetry as a performance art in another way. Despite concerns in advance about the negative impact of television for Irish children, the success of Lambert's puppetry endeavours on television enabled him to create a dedicated puppet theatre. While television provided some financial success for Lambert that allowed him to invest in the Lambert Puppet Theatre, it was the versatility of puppetry that enabled his television audiences to equally appreciate the theatrical puppet performances at the theatre.

5.2 Eugene Lambert, puppetry and Ireland's new television service

Journal article published in *Eire-Ireland* in Fall / Winter 2024:

'A flash gun for making puffs of smoke':
Eugene Lambert, puppetry and Ireland's new television service

President Eamon de Valera described the introduction of a domestic television service in Ireland in 1961 as having the potential for 'incalculable good' but also to be a force to do 'irreparable harm'.[1] As with the arrival of television elsewhere, Ireland was to find television programming as a way to celebrate national identity, values and culture, but also to expose the Irish population to the identities, values and cultures of other societies. Children's programming has been recognized as a significant and distinct aspect of television schedules for both commercial and public service broadcasters. As the plans for the introduction of Irish television progressed, debates around the impact on children focused on the potential dangers of inappropriate content and the potential use of the medium as an explicit tool of formal educational.

An examination of Telefís Éireann's schedules in its early years of broadcasting shows some attempt to provide programmes for a younger audience. As with other areas in the schedule, however, Telefís Éireann was restricted by limited budgets and had to resort to significant amounts of bought-in programming. The schedules for children's programming, throughout the 1960s, was dominated by American shows alongside some domestically produced programmes, when daily broadcasting started at 5pm on weekdays and 5:30pm at weekends. Telefís Éireann's reliance on imported programmes in the first decade is calculated at 54%, but

[1] 'The people will determine the programmes' in *The Irish Press* (Dublin, Ireland, 1 Jan. 1962), p. 1.

this dominance of, mainly American, imported material rises to 71% of children's programming.[2] Imported children's programming was dominated by Westerns, such as *Annie Oakley, Bat Masterson, The Cisco Kid*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Kit Carson*, and *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*. A typical week's programming would typically include an episode of each of these series within the early evening. The daily reliance on American Westerns was punctuated with weekly American sit-coms, such as *Bachelor Father*, *The Donna Reid Show* and *Father Knows Best*. In the first five years of its existence, there were never less than six American comedy imports on Telefís Éireann each week.[3]

Locally produced children's programmes tended to be short, simple, straight to camera productions, broadcast once a week. Actor and Comedian, Jimmy O'Dea, hosted a ten-minute storytelling series, *Once Upon a Time*, while Bláithín Ni Chnaimhin gave drawing lessons in the bilingual *Let's Draw*. Other early evening television included a weekly fifteen-minute traditional Irish music show, *Tar Isteach* and a one-minute Irish language learning series, *Focal ar Fhocal,* broadcast three times a week. The first home-produced children's drama was a weekly twenty-minute bi-lingual playlet series, set in a Dublin Grocer's *Siopa an Bhreatnaigh*, first broadcast in January 1962. The use of bilingual programming illustrates the broadcaster's ongoing compromise between meeting the statutory requirements and the expectations of their new audience. *Siopa an Bhreatnaigh* had been conceived as an English language series but was recast by the Controller of Programmes to address the station's Irish language obligations. This was explained in an *RTV Guide* article about the programme, in which Edith Cusack describes how this was achieved: 'The shopkeeper and his wife were Irish speaking, but naturally spoke English to their customers'.[4] Bilingual proposals for children's programming were more likely to be successful as they increased the station's statutory Irish language component. Patrick Gilligan's analysis of children's drama on Telefís Éireann points to the impact of this: 'This strategy determined to a significant degree the character of home-produced television programming for children, including drama provision, for the duration of the first decade of transmission.'.[5]

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[2] Kaarle Nordstreng and Tapio Varis, *Television traffic: a one-way street? A survey and analysis of the international flow of television programme material* (Paris, 1974), p. 22.

[3] Roddy Flynn, 'It Is Against the Basic Concepts of Good Government to Subject Our People to Rosemary Clooney at the Public Expense": Imported Programming on Early Irish Television' in *Éire-Ireland (St. Paul)*, l, no. 1 (2015), p. 79.

[4] Édith Cusack, 'Siopa an Bhreatnaigh' in *RTV Guide*, Oct. 1962.

[5] Patrick Gilligan, 'Box of delights, bridge of feathers: children's drama on Telefís Éireann / RTÉ 1962-1987' (Dublin City University. School of Communications, 1992), p. 61.

One of the ways in which Telefís Éireann was to expand its home-produced children's programming was to look to a formula developed in both the United States and the United Kingdom, where puppet characters were used to engage a younger audience. Thus, through the medium of television, puppetry and puppet theatre was given a level of prominence in Ireland never seen previously. This new avenue of work impacted significantly on the career of Eugene Lambert, who, up to that time, had been a part-time performer in cabaret, variety and children's entertainment with Punch & Judy and ventriloquism shows. As this article demonstrates, Lambert would become a significant part of children's television and theatre in Ireland for more than twenty years. It outlines the socio-economic and cultural context to the introduction of a television service for Ireland and examines the role of puppetry as a form of pre-television entertainment. It considers the central positioning of children's programming in television services in Britain, the US and Ireland and examines how television impacted on the art of puppetry as a medium of education and entertainment. Finally, it examines how the migration of puppetry to television led to the creation of what became 'effectively the national children's theatre of Ireland'.[6] The article draws on previously unpublished interview material with Eugene Lambert.

Ireland on the eve of a new television service

In the aftermath of World War II – in which Ireland opted for a policy of neutrality – the country found itself in a period of uncertain transition, economically, struggling to determine a path to self-sufficiency; politically, exploiting the potential of its independence; and culturally torn between nurturing tradition and tasting modernity. During the 1950s, Europe was rebuilding cities and realigning relationships. As rationing was phased out, Britain achieved full employment and more people than ever bought their own home and the development of the package holiday allowed people to travel abroad for the first time. Similarly, the United States enjoyed a post-war economic boom, with a record birth-rate. In a world where leisure and consumption were driving popular culture, rock and roll music and television became the mainstays of popular entertainment.

Irish people watched these developments and heard a great deal about them in letters from family members who in their thousands emigrated throughout the 1950s. For most of the decade, the Irish economy was 'effectively stagnant'.[7] Between 1951 and 1961 the number in employment fell across the economy: 120,000 fewer employed in agriculture; 50,000 fewer in

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[6] McCormick, 'Lambert Theatre and Puppetry Redefined', p. 287.

[7] Carmel Quinlan, Dermot Keogh and Finbarr O'Shea, *The lost decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork, 2004), p. 74.

industry and services and 20,000 fewer in construction. Unemployment rates rose, only to be stemmed by mass emigration of over 400,000 people over the decade, representing 75% of the birth rate – many following the 537,709 people recorded in the 1951 British census as having been born in Ireland and who had voted with their feet previously.[8] The continuing dominance of the Catholic Church was in line with Devane's description of Ireland 'as the most Catholic country in the world'.[9] The continued historical dominance of the church in Ireland seemed out-of-step with the nascent pace of change evident across the world with a new questioning of the accepted influence of those in authority (be that the state and/or church authorities) on the economic, cultural and social aspects of people's lives.

While the economic statistics and the wider society suggest a sombre tone and tenor of 1950s Ireland, the country was not without positive moments. On the international stage, in 1951 Dr E.T.S. Walton, of Trinity College, was jointly awarded the Nobel prize for his work on splitting the atom. Ireland became a member of the United Nations in 1955. Ronnie Delaney won gold for Ireland in the 1500m race at the Olympics in Melbourne in 1956. Ireland's identity as an independent and progressive state was being forged even in the face of apparent national economic failure. Ireland had been somewhat culturally isolated since achieving independence, but, becoming more secure with a sense of national identity, as the 1950s unfolded, the country began to look outward with more confidence. There were signs of movement in, what would nowadays be called, the creative / cultural sectors. An Arts Council was formed 1951, while the same year saw the foundation of the Wexford Festival of Music and Arts, later to become the annual Wexford International Opera Festival. The Cork International Film Festival started in 1956, followed by the Dublin International Theatre Festival in 1957 and the establishment of Ardmore Film Studios in 1958.

Ireland's economic landscape was to change from the late 1950s. The genesis of this transformation came with 1958 government a white paper 'Programme for Economic Expansion'. Described as 'the first shot fired on behalf of the new economic pragmatism', the plan redirected the Irish economy away from its dependence on a disappointing agricultural sector and towards a more industrial path.[10] Developments were not linear and often lacked consistency – either positively or negatively. As one writer noted: 'The process of social change in 1950s Ireland was tortured and fragmented with many ruptions and ructions along

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[8] Enda Gerard Delaney, *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain, 1921-1971* (Liverpool, 2000), pp 160–225.

[9] James Devane, 'Catholic Ireland' in *Irish Rosary*, Dec. 1950.

[10] Quinlan et al., *The lost decade*, p. 45.

the way.'[11] Indeed, as Ireland grappled with the pull of modernity and the restriction of conservative forces, it mirrored 'a battle between conservativism and renewal which was fought out virtually everywhere.'[12] Describing it as a 'battle' between the two forces assumes a binary that some would suggest conceals the complexity of the situation. Luke Gibbons recognizes that 'The media are often portrayed as modernizing agencies, releasing society from the weight of tradition', but he also contends that 'there is nothing inevitable about it'.[13] Gibbons points to 'the role of media in perpetuating the cult of the monarchy in Britain' as an example of this. Irish television, although an instrument of modernity, provided a means for the broadcast of Irish programming – including that of traditional Irish culture.

Throughout the 1950s, as plans for the opening of Ireland's television service were underway, the local variety scene provided a vibrant part of Irish popular entertainment. Although puppetry had never been as significant a form of theatre or popular entertainment as it was in other parts of Europe, ventriloquism was a popular act on the 1950s variety circuit in Ireland, as it was in Britain. Many theatres in Dublin and the provinces played host to touring variety acts, including puppet companies and ventriloquists, the latter of whom enjoyed a heyday in the UK at that time. The more substantial puppetry performances were often from well-known puppet touring companies, including Vittorio Podrecca's Italian company, *Piccoli Theatre*, who performed their marionette review - with 1,200 marionettes - at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre over Easter 1954.[14] British touring puppeteers were frequent visitors to Dublin theatres from the end of the war to the 1960s, including Eric Bramall's Harlequin Puppet Theatre and the Hogarth Puppets, creators of BBC's *Muffin the Mule*. The ventriloquism acts of the time targeted an adult audience, typically around a comedy routine. Radio ventriloquism became a feature of the early years of radio broadcasting – particularly where the vent act was an established name from the theatre or variety circuit. The most famous of these was American Edgar Bergen with his doll, Charlie McCarthy, whose US radio show ran from 1936 to 1955. Bergen was one of several such acts to perform in Dublin when he brought his vent act to Dublin's Theatre Royal on 31st May 1953.[15]

Classified advertisements in Irish newspapers through the 1950s indicate the level of Punch & Judy performers available for children's parties and private functions. Performers like Ronald

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[11] Eleanor O'Leary, *Youth and popular culture in 1950s Ireland* (London, New York, 2018), p. 2.

[12] Fallon, *An age of innocence*, p. 271.

[13] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996), p. 70.

[14] 'One Thousand Wooden Heads Make a Show' in *Evening Herald* (Dublin, Ireland, 24 Apr. 1954), p. 6.

[15] 'Ventriloquist's Dublin Visit' in *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland, 29 May 1953), p. 8.

Benson, Harry Cody and Neville Wiltshire developed their Punch & Judy routine as an adjunct to their conjuring act. Puppeteers like Eugene Lambert provided Punch & Judy shows at children's parties during the day and a ventriloquist act for variety theatre, cabaret and after-dinner entertainment at night. Lambert tells of doing seven separate performances in one day, starting with children's parties in the afternoon and finishing with his vent act at a midnight event in Bray. In an RTÉ radio interview, the actress, Maureen Potter, told the story of Eugene Lambert and Dublin's Lord Mayor, Alfie Byrne, encountering one at multiple events in one evening. As they entered the Gresham Hotel together at a late hour, Eugene apologised to the Lord Mayor for having to hear his act again – to which Alfie Byrne replied 'If you don't say anything about me giving the same speech, I won't say anything about you giving the same act'.[16] But the art of puppetry extended beyond children's parties: for about fifteen years from the early 1940s, an amateur company of puppeteers, the Dublin Marionette Group (DMG) performed at a variety of venues, principally in Dublin, but also at festivals around the country. The group's broad repertoire was wide ranging and included nativity plays, Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus', Irish language productions for children and operatic performances for the first few years of the Wexford Festival in the early 1950s.[17]

Television and children's programming

During the 1950s increasing numbers of households in the east and north-east of Ireland were able to receive British television stations. The Central Statistics Office estimates that there were some 20,000 television sets in the country in 1958 and the number was growing rapidly.[18] The Irish authorities could not ignore the impact of the new medium even if some influential voices in political and religious life believed that the messages and morals of British television programming was not in keeping with the conservative views promoted for Irish people.

The rollout of television services was a staggered affair across the world. America's first television station started broadcasting in 1928, while the British state broadcaster introduced a television service in 1936. The British television service adopted a public service broadcasting model from the outset, building on their experience of public service radio broadcasting and

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[16] 'Maureen Potter on Eugene Lambert & Alfie Byrne' in *Bowman's Sunday* (17 Dec. 2017). The accuracy of this story must be questioned as Alfie Byrne was Lord Mayor from 1931 to 1938 and Eugene Lambert only moved to Dublin in 1950. However, Alfie Byrne was active until his death in 1956, or the interaction may have been with another Lord Mayor of Dublin.

[17] 'Wexford's Ambitious Festival'.

[18] *That was then, this is now: Change in Ireland, 1949-1999*, by Adrian Redmond, Pn 8084 (Dublin, 2000), p. 57.

cautioned by the commercial priority of American television programming. In Ireland, a government commission, set up in 1958, resulted in the Broadcasting Act 1960, under which a new television service was established. The 1960 Broadcasting Act sought to achieve a public service television service with specific deliverables, but to operate on a commercial basis and be self-sufficient. Described by Robert Savage as having '…two contradictory objectives. It was required to 'serve the nation' by providing educational and cultural programmes, and it was responsible for providing popular entertainment that would find a large audience and attract rate-paying advertisers.'[19] With a mixture of anticipation and expectation, the new medium represented the technology of modernity. Many believed that it should facilitate the aspirations of those who wanted change, while others looked to the new service to foster and encourage the views, values and beliefs of traditional Ireland. The report of the Television Commission expressed another contradictory aspect of the new service in its impact on television, realizing both the potential opportunities and dangers. It noted that 'television should be used in such a way as to be beneficial to the viewers. Indiscriminate and extended viewing of television programmes may have an undesirable effect on children, particularly those of tender years. Parents must accept the duty of regulating the type of programmes to be viewed by their children and also the extent of such viewing.'[20] The importance of children's programming was illustrated in the commission's recommendation that one of five advisory committees to be appointed to offer advice to the television authority should cover 'the welfare and education of children'.[21]

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, Irish newspapers provided a lively forum for consideration of the impact of the promised advent of Irish television – including the impact of the new service for Irish children. Coverage ranged from the voicing of the worries about the potential dangers for children to the educational potential of the medium. These views were supported by news of the experiences of the UK and USA from their earlier introduction of television. As a dominant force in Irish society of the time, the Catholic Church was vocal in ensuring that religious programming would reflect the views of the church at that time, but this concern extended to the impact of television on children. Headlines such as 'Bishops Alert Catholics to Dangers of TV' were common as commentators struggled with balancing the favourable and unwanted potential of the medium.[22] One editorial in the *Catholic Standard* acknowledged television's impact as 'certainly one of the greatest educational forces ever

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[19] Robert J. Savage, *A loss of innocence?: television and Irish society, 1960-72* (Manchester, 2010), p. 16.
[20] George D. Murnaghan, *Report of the Television Commission, 1959* (Dublin, 1959), p. 12.
[21] Ibid., p. 37.
[22] 'Bishops Alert Catholics To Dangers of TV' in *Catholic Standard*, 6 Dec. 1957, p. 3.

discovered and launched on the world'. But it also noted that 'we shall not have certainty until the present generation of children attain maturity, about the effects television has on the mind and heart of the child'.[23] Such fears would again manifest themselves on the opening night of Telefís Éireann when the head of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Cardinal John D'Alton, noted that the state, arriving late to the medium of television, could 'profit by the mistakes of others and avoid the pitfalls into which they have fallen'. He also issued a warning to parents that 'no matter how meritorious the programmes' they should not allow 'their children to become addicts to TV'.[24] International news stories that would previously have been only of passing interest, took on a new importance in the context of the promised television service. A *Sunday Independent* article, eighteen months before the opening night of Telefís Éireann, titled 'TV's newest victim', lamented the loss of Japanese picture storytellers, attributed to the popularity of television amongst Japanese children.[25]

Amongst the coverage of competing worries and ambitions, there was also mention of the positive experience of television in other countries – including the perceived threat it posed to the arts. In 1959 the *Sunday Independent* reported that Father Angnellus Andrew, O.F.M., religious adviser to the B.B.C. had observed. in a lecture for the Dublin International Festival of Music and the Arts, that 'the fear that television would destroy the arts has not been realized. It has, in fact, proved to be a great stimulant to the theatre, music and literature'.[26] But the concept of television being a stimulant to the theatre was not widely shared. Deputy Noel Browne's contribution to the Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee on Finance in 1959 sought taxation relief for theatre promoters, based on the impending impact of television. Browne noted that 'the live theatre is possibly the finest entertainment of all available to us and it is probably the one most likely to suffer, in the early days at any rate, as a result of competition from the television service when it comes into operation.'[27]

Political deliberation around the prospects for the new television service encouraged the inclusion of educational opportunities within children's programming. Senator Thomas Mullins advanced the case for 'a schools programme' to be developed in conjunction with the

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[23] 'Television and Catholic Truth (Editorial)' in *Catholic Standard* (Dublin, Ireland, 23 Oct. 1959), p. 4.

[24] '"Powerful appeal of TV" Cardinal D'Alton has advice for parents' in *Irish Press* (Dublin, Ireland, 1 Jan. 1962), p. 5.

[25] Kenneth Ishii, 'TV's Newest Victim' in *Sunday Independent* (Dublin, Ireland, 19 July 1959), p. 10.

[26] 'TV is a fabulous patron of arts' in *Sunday Independent* (Dublin, Ireland, 21 June 1959), p. 6.

[27] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Committee on Finance. - Resolution No. 9—General (Resumed). – Dáil Éireann (16th Dáil) – Wednesday, 22 Apr 1959 – Houses of the Oireachtas', Text, 1959.

Department of Education.[28] His colleague, Senator Edward Maguire, underlined the potential benefits that television would provide in allowing children to look beyond Ireland: 'We, in this country, need to know what is happening in other parts of the world. We should realize the advantages of having in a room in our houses the most extraordinary variety of thoughts, ideas, views and scenes of all kinds. It is wrong to think of television only in terms of comics or variety shows, and people who think like that are few and far between.'[29]

There was little agreement on the benefits or consequences of young people being able to access material from other parts of the world. Deputy Oliver J Flanagan was forthright in expressing his concern. 'If we adopt the same pattern as the British television service, God help the young people of this country who will be looking at it. Programmes were put on the British television service which brought disgust to any decent person, programmes which were unfit for children.'[30] Deputy Padraig Faulkner expressed similar views. 'On certain programmes of the B.B.C. and I.T.V. we have seen things which we hold dear and sacred mocked and spurned. We have seen an attempt made to substitute a pagan philosophy for our Christian moral code. There is a struggle going on at the moment for the souls of our children. This struggle will be intensified in future.'[31] In a similar vein, Deputy Daniel Desmond suggested delaying the introduction of the television service by observing 'we could at present do very well by biding our time and scrutinising more closely the effects and reactions of television in the Six Counties and in Britain before deciding to embark on the provision of a service which may prove detrimental to the children of today, who are the men and women of tomorrow.'[32] But experience of children's programming was not to be limited to looking abroad. Radio broadcasting experience of children's programmes influenced the approach for the new television service. The assistant head of children's programmes for radio, Maeve Conway, was chosen to lead the television equivalent. In that regard, it was not surprising that some of the most successful children's television programmes during the 1960s had their origins on radio, including The School Around the Corner and *Murphy agus a Cháirde*.

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[28] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Broadcasting Authority Bill, 1959—Second Stage. – Seanad Éireann (9th Seanad) – Wednesday, 20 Jan 1960 – Houses of the Oireachtas', Text, 1960.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Committee on Finance. - Broadcasting Authority Bill, 1959 [Seanad]—Second Stage. – Dáil Éireann (16th Dáil) – Wednesday, 24 Feb 1960 – Houses of the Oireachtas', Text, 1960.

[31] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Broadcasting Authority Bill, 1959 [Seanad] — Second Stage (Resumed). – Dáil Éireann (16th Dáil) – Wednesday, 16 Mar 1960 – Houses of the Oireachtas', Text, 1960.

[32] Oireachtas, 'Committee on Finance. - Broadcasting Authority Bill, 1959 [Seanad]—Second Stage. – Dáil Éireann (16th Dáil) – Wednesday, 24 Feb 1960 – Houses of the Oireachtas'.

Internationally, children's programming was recognized as a significant and distinct aspect of television schedules for both commercial and public service broadcasters. Much of the debate shaping the policies and programming for children's television centred on either the dangers on inappropriate viewing or on the educative and educational potential of the new medium. The 1967 retrofitting of a public service element to American television acknowledged that 'it is in the public interest to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities'. The BBC's first television for children, *Children's Hour*, which had its origins in radio, saw its remit as being 'to entertain the children in a stimulating way, guiding their reading, encouraging their various interests and inculcating the love of God and their neighbour'[33] The potential of the more formal use of the medium, as educational, was also recognized as evident in Ireland from some of the parliamentary debates on the introduction of the new television service.

Children's programming was a substantial element of the new television service from the outset, comprising 253 hours, or 11.9%, of broadcasting in the first year. In the first year of broadcasting, children's programmes occupied the first hour, from 5pm, of a six-hour daily schedule and included featured drama, information, stories, variety, sport, art and crafts. The programmes achieved a good balance of educative and informative, while still providing engaging entertainment. While the extent of hours allocated to children's programmes was consistent throughout the first decade of service, the cost of home-produced programmes was unsustainable and this shrank from 96 to 117 hours in the first three years, to just 17 to 54 hours in the final three years of the decade.[34]

Drawing on the experience elsewhere, television executives in Dublin when approaching domestically produced programmes for children looked to puppetry as a means to create engaging television. Early children's television in America used puppet characters to engage more effectively with a young audience. The earliest significant children's programme on American television was *The Howdy Doody Show*, featuring a marionette, or string puppet, as the main character interacting with the host *Buffalo Bob* (Robert Schmidt). The series quickly developed to occupy a daily one-hour slot on the NBC network from 1947 to 1960 and, by 1949, became the most popular programme on American television. The programme was significant in that it was one of the first attempts to integrate live actors with puppets – specifically with marionettes. Also notable was the fact that the original character was a

[33] *Report of the Broadcasting Committee, 1949*, by William Henry Beveridge, Cmnd. 8116 (1951), p. 27.
[34] Gilligan, 'Box of delights, bridge of feathers'.

realization of a radio show character, *Elmer*, which had been developed by Schmidt as part of an earlier radio show. British television's opening, on 9 November 1936, featured a half-hour variety show, including a ventriloquist act by Arthur Prince, who had enjoyed a successful career in variety with his dummy sailor-character, *Jim*. However, the television service's beginning was truncated when it was taken off the air during WWW II, only returning on 7 June 1946, with the first children's programme on British television. This was a live Sunday afternoon slot on BBC called *Children's Hour* or *For the Children*. Puppets featured prominently in children's television of the time – and marionettes were to be a significant and successful aspect of that programming. The first episode of *For the Children* featured the marionettes of the Hogarth Puppet Circus. By October 1946 the first children's television star was created in *Muffin the Mule*, who was to become one of the most famous marionette characters of all time. The next children's character on British television was also a marionette: *Andy Pandy* made his television debut on 11 July 1950, initially as a trial, but its success led to the creation of a children's series called *Watch with Mother*. The success of marionette characters continued with further BBC children's series featuring *The Flower Pot Men* in 1952 and *The Woodentops* in 1955, both of which were string puppet productions.

Eugene Lambert and puppetry on Telefís Éireann

The opening night of Telefís Éireann echoed that of the BBC, twenty-five years earlier, in featuring Ireland's first televised puppet performance, a pre-recorded ventriloquism act, Seoirse agus Beartlai, by George Boyle. 'Purporting to be the only all Irish speaking dummy, but not the only dummy speaking Irish, Beartlai was a hit and was favourably mentioned by most of the critics reviewing the night's proceedings.'.[35] The Irish language aspect of the performance was significant in the selection of the amateur ventriloquist for the performance, as there were better-known professional ventriloquists in Dublin at that time, but who did not perform as Gaelige. But the promotion of the national language was enshrined in the new broadcasting legislation – Section 17 of the Broadcasting Act, 1960, stipulated that 'in performing its functions, the Authority shall bear constantly in mind the national aims of restoring the Irish language and developing the national culture and shall endeavour to promote the attainment of those aims.' Following his appearance on opening night, Boyle was invited to make a regular contribution to Children's Corner for a thirteen-week run in 1961 - an arrangement that was replicated the following year. For Boyle this resulted in a series of twenty-minute television programmes as Seorise agus Beartlai and a part-time career on Telefís Éireann for a further five years. But it was another ventriloquist who would become the

[35] Boyle, *I Must be Talking to Myself!*, p. 259.

mainstay of television programmes in the early 1960s, and who would remain a constant presence in the living-rooms of Irish households for the following two decades.

As noted by McCormick and Pratasik, there was an international reappraisal of puppetry and the puppet theatre in the first part of the twentieth century.[36] The puppet theatre was reevaluated as being a serious artistic form of expression, rather than just a form of popular entertainment. Eugene Lambert was to adopt this new perspective on puppetry as an integral part of children's programming in Ireland's new television service, allowing him to achieve technical and aesthetic innovations, despite the limited resources available.

Growing up in Sligo, Eugene Lambert developed a talent for mimicry and created a rudimentary ventriloquist's dummy to entertain his family and friends. Lambert gave his first public performance at his school's prize day in December 1942. 'Eugene Lambert, another student of the college, gave a novel and delightful performance of ventriloquism with his pal, Charlie.'[37] Lambert had further success as part of Sligo's annual pantomime: 'Ventriloquist Eugene Lambert and his pal Charlie . . . gave an exceptionally entertaining performance entitled Backchat.'[38] He was to earn further local praise following an appearance at a variety concert in January 1946: 'Eugene Lambert was a young ventriloquist whose equal he had not heard anywhere, not even in the city.'[39] Lambert moved to Dublin in 1950 and built a reputation as a variety act, before leaving to tour England and Wales with *The Irish Revels* the following year.

Returning to Dublin in 1953, Lambert performed his act every weekend over the following nine years while maintaining his day job as a fitter with a refrigeration company. He added a Punch & Judy routine to his portfolio – to avoid the need to fill an entire hour's performance as a ventriloquist. Lambert's first radio broadcast was on 20 June 1953 as an act on *Variety Roll Call*.[40] Several further guest appearances led to his own radio series, *Finnegan picks the Tune* featuring Lambert and his vent-doll, Finnegan, introducing children's music, over several seasons from 1962 to 1968. Lambert's radio experience marked him as a likely candidate for the new television service. However, the commitment to the Irish language was to see him upstaged by another ventriloquist on Telefís Éireann's opening night. 'I was half-promised a

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[36] McCormick & Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*, p. 208.

[37] 'Summerhill College: Bishop's praise for professors and students' in *The Sligo Champion*, 26 Dec. 1942, p. 5.

[38] 'Brilliant Success of "Babes in the Wood"' in *The Sligo Champion*, 2 Jan. 1943, p. 5.

[39] 'Successful Concert at Manorhamilton' in *The Sligo Champion*, 2 Feb. 1946, p. 5.

[40] 'Eugene and Frankie were "on the air"' in *The Sligo Champion*, 27 June 1953, p. 5.

new children's series starting on Telefís Éireann, but, as luck would have it, it was to be a bi-lingual show, and a newcomer on the scene, a young ventriloquist called George Boyle, got the job, and was very successful with the programme, called '*Seoirse and Bartlai'*.'[41]

Realizing that the fledgling Irish television service was unlikely to accommodate a second ventriloquist on a regular basis, Lambert used whatever television opportunities he had with his vent-dummy, Finnegan, to develop other forms of puppetry. For example, he joined forces with a storyteller colleague from radio, Michael P O'Connor, to provide voices for a short slot, *Home with O'Hagan*, that featured hand puppet characters. By the time Telefís Éireann went into its second year of service, Lambert had built a busy career in entertainment in theatre, concerts, after-dinner entertainment, children's parties, while continuing in radio and his day job. An offer of a television puppet series prompted his decision to concentrate on puppetry. Lambert's proposal to set the puppet drama in a blacksmith's forge was accepted and he found himself under pressure to deliver. 'There were seven puppets to be made and only six weeks to our deadline [for] *Carta Hudaí*: Telefís Éireann's first puppet show.'[42] The pressure to complete the show was somewhat alleviated by the fact that everything was so new. As Lambert put it, 'the excitement in television in those early days was wonderful and everyone was so helpful because we were learning as we went along'.[43]

The impact of television on Lambert's puppetry

The type of puppets proposed for *Carta Hudaí* was significant for both broadcaster and puppeteer. Well into the discussions about the project, the Head of Children's Programmes, Maeve Conway, mentioned that the puppets should be marionettes, or string puppets. The most successful children's programmes in the United States and Britain had already featured marionettes, so it is likely that Maeve Conway's choice was influenced by that. For Eugene Lambert, this meant he had a steep learning curve as he had never used or created string puppets previously: 'Now I had no string puppets, I had years ago, made a marionette and I said oh yeah, that's a good idea.'[44] The puppeteer was later to report that each of the 18' puppets took him 50 hours to make.[45] ('Murphy Agus a Cháirde'). The puppet series featured a blacksmith, Hudaí, and based at his forge, or in Irish, carta: *Carta Hudaí* was aired on Telefís

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[41] Eugene Lambert, *Eugene's Memoir - partial unpublished memoir* (Monkstown, Dublin, 2010).

[42] Eugene Lambert, 'Puppeteer & Showman: series of recorded interviews with Martin Molony, at Monkstown, Co Dublin over several dates in October 2009.', Oct. 2009.

[43] Lambert, *Eugene's Memoir - partial unpublished memoir*.

[44] Lambert, 'Puppeteer & Showman: series of recorded interviews with Martin Molony, at Monkstown, Co Dublin over several dates in October 2009.'

[45] Donall Farmer, 'Murphy Agus a Cháirde' in *RTV Guide*, 5 Mar. 1965.

Éireann from July to September 1964 and was the first of several string puppet productions featuring Lambert on Irish television over the following twenty years. The bilingual ten-part series comprised ten-minute episodes, with substantially more Irish than English. The voices for the characters were provided by Chris Curran, who also played any incidental music for the series.

The profile that Lambert had developed within Irish popular entertainment at the time was based around his ventriloquism, both in variety and on radio. Having taken the opportunity to perform on television with other forms of puppetry, he was, effectively, starting from scratch, both technically and without a profile or known characters. By the time that Telefís Éireann was starting to develop their schedule of children's programming, British television had already built programmes around puppet characters such as *Muffin the Mule, Andy Pandy, The Woodentops, the Flowerpot Men* and *Rag, Tag and Bobtail.* Alongside these featured characters, British television broadcast dramatic puppet performances as one would experience in visiting a puppet theatre. These included performances by the Hogarth Puppets, the Mumford Marionettes and John Wright's London Marionette Theatre.

The opportunity presented to Lambert by Telefís Éireann was in the use of dramatic performances around stories that reflected aspects of Irish history and culture. Lambert's performance career had been built around variety and popular entertainment, but using puppets for *Carta Hudaí* was more akin to a dramatic theatrical production. This placed greater emphasis on sets and props, as well as on the movement of the marionettes – all new experiences for the entertainer, who had never even made a professional marionette previously. As Lambert recalled, 'I had a copy of Waldo Lancaster's book on making marionettes and I stuck rigidly to his method and I made the puppets.'[46] *While* Carta Hudaí *was well received and allowed the fledging television service to explore what was possible in the use of puppets as a dramatic form, it was regarded, in retrospect, as too staid. 'They* [*Telefís Éireann] said it was too restrictive and they wanted a bit more magic.'*[47] *Within a few months, another series was in production. Building on the experience of* Carta Hudaí*, the second bilingual series was more imaginative in its storyline and content, therefore allowing greater use of the medium of puppetry, as well as in the use of sets and props.* Murphy agus a Cháirde *was created and filmed over the autumn and winter of 1964 and broadcast 132* episodes from January 1965 to 1968. This series featured a king, a mischievous prince, a witch

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[46] Lambert, 'Puppeteer & Showman: series of recorded interviews with Martin Molony, at Monkstown, Co Dublin over several dates in October 2009.'

[47] Ibid.

and lots of opportunity for magic – including a 'tree of knowledge'. Once again, actor Chris Curran voiced each of the characters – sometimes up to six in any one episode – as well as providing incidental music in the form of playing the piano and tin whistle, when required.

Although Murphy agus a Cháirde *was to become such a success, its arrival was quietly announced in the 1965 New Year's Day issue of the RTV Guide*. An accompanying short article told readers that the programme would feature an initial eight puppets, to be supplemented as the series progressed. The series was written by Pádraic O'Neill, who based the scripts on a series of stories he had written for radio broadcast some year previously – another example of Radio Éireann's influence on Telefís Éireann's programming and content. *The first producer of Murphy Agus A Cháirde*, Donall Farmer, remarked on the strong audience reaction to the series in an article in March 1965: 'No one can be blamed for believing that the puppets have a life of their own. In fact, a good deal of planning and hard work by mere humans goes into the programme.' The producer was also struck by the amalgamation of skills within his production team: 'Pádraic O'Neill's script calls for all the skills of Eugene Lambert and the members of his family who assist him in manipulating the puppets. Chris Curran speaks the parts, which is no mean feat when one considers that in any one episode there can be as many as six characters.' Farmer concludes the article with the spotlight firmly on the stars of the show: 'But however important the human beings are, they are forced into the background when the puppets take over every Thursday at 5:30pm.'[48] By the final (132nd), episode broadcast on Sunday, 5 May 1968, the cast of *Murphy Agus A Cháirde* had grown to 17 characters, with all of them still voiced by Chris Curran. Such was the centrality of Lambert to the schedule of Telefís Éireann that, reviewing the station's Christmas Day 1966 output, the Irish Times television critic, Ken Gray observed the station's programmes:

> …could have raised tinge of anxiety among those who fancied they might perhaps be seeing double, if you sat in front of your set for long enough you saw some of the same people twice. Eugene Lambert shared a children's party (which was extremely enjoyable) in the afternoon with Maureen Potter and Milo O'Shea, and was back a couple of hours later with 'Murphy agus a Cháirde'… It was a trifle confusing, suggesting that either we are short on talent or that Telefís Éireann operates within a very tight circle.[49]

[48] Farmer, 'Murphy Agus a Cháirde'.

[49] Ken Gray, 'Television: After the ball was over' in *Irish Times* (Dublin, Ireland, 29 Dec. 1966), p. 8.

As *Murphy agus a Cháirde* had been built on the learning from *Carta Hudaí*, the next attempt was to bring the format to an even greater level of sophistication. *Brógeen follows the Magic Tune* was a twelve-part drama puppet drama series, first broadcast in January 1969. Each character was voiced by a separate actor and performed exclusively in English. Each episode lasted twenty to twenty-five minutes, which is significantly long for a puppet feature. The scale of the production required three steel puppet bridges, each twelve feet high, from where the puppeteers would control the marionettes on nine-foot strings below. Telefís Éireann had been reconstituted as Radio Telefís Éireann (RTÉ) in 1966 and *Brógeen follows the Magic Tune* became the station's first international sale of a home-produced drama series – to a Norwegian broadcaster, NRK.[50] The series was based on books by Ireland's leading children's writer of the time, Patricia Lynch and adapted for television by Frank Kelly. Asked about the use of puppets to dramatize these stories, Kelly explained that the reason lay in the nature of children's imaginations:

> Puppets have the necessary doll-like quality for a fairytale, where the perspectives may require complete suspension of disbelief, like the landscapes painted on china. It just doesn't seem to matter that the bridge in the familiar willow pattern is somewhat large for such a small stream. When you look at the picture, you entre an uncomplicated world, where things are as the mind wants them to be.[51]

Kelly also pointed to the suitability of Patricia Lynch's characters for puppet dramatisation: 'The characters lend themselves ideally to the art of the puppet-maker. Some are ethereal, some robust, and as in all good fairytales, some are grotesque.'[52]

The improving quality of each of the three series of puppet dramas from 1963 to 1969 is evidence of the steep learning curve achieved by Lambert and the RTÉ production team. There was a genuine sense of pioneering effort from the writers, actors, puppeteers and production staff. Their appetite to learn and willingness to try new things brought the reward of an enhanced quality of programme over each of the series. Lambert later recalled the pioneering atmosphere of the time:

> I'll never forget the first time we went into studio and the sets were made and the setup, and we learned so much as we went along about manipulation and about, everybody did. And the cameramen learned, you know, everybody was learning, and it

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[50] Gilligan, 'Box of delights, bridge of feathers'.

[51] Frank Kelly, 'Brógeen' in *RTE Guide*, 11 Apr. 1969, p. 13.

[52] Ibid.

> was a great time to be in television because everybody was very helpful, and you could make suggestions to the cameraman or the cameraman could make suggestions to us. It was a wonderful time. That series was a great success because everybody was so helpful, and we made our own effects. Barry Kelly was the head cameraman and he, with me, made a machine for doing dry ice and we made several things, and I had made a flash gun for making puffs of smoke. Looking back, we did amazing things, you know, experimental things at the time.[53]

Eugene Lambert's pioneering work on children's television took a different form through his involvement in *Wanderly Wagon*, a children's drama that combined puppets performing alongside live actors. This combination marked a significant development in television puppetry. Puppetry on television had first presented the fixed view of the puppet theatre, as if the television screen was the stage proscenium. Later, puppet shows were filmed without the restrictions of a puppet theatre stage or a proscenium opening, moving beyond the view a live audience would experience, as seen in the BBC's *Andy Pandy* and *The Flower Pot Men* in the 1950s. This allowed the camera shot to define the audience perspective. Editing a series of shots like this gave the television audience the same experience as watching a television drama with human actors. Before *Wanderly Wagon*, television puppets appeared alongside human actors in chat show style, like Britain's *Muffin the Mule* and *Sooty*, but never as interacting characters in a drama, presenting both as equals.

Combining puppets alongside human actors was later to become the hallmark of the world's most successful television puppetry in *Sesame Street*. However, the *Children's Television Workshop* had originally intended the puppet characters to be filmed separately to the actors, portraying the former as living underground and to show only human characters in street scenes. The intention was to maintain the sense of realism that the location was a real street, with real people. However, the show's Executive Producer, David Connell, successfully challenged this in his review of test episodes: 'Tell me, define for me, what is fantasy and what is reality for a four-year-old watching a television set.'[54]

There were no such doubts for the *Wanderly Wagon* production team. The brainchild of a friend of Lambert's, American director, Don Lennox, 'The idea was to have a wagon travelling

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[53] Lambert, 'Puppeteer & Showman: series of recorded interviews with Martin Molony, at Monkstown, Co Dublin over several dates in October 2009.'

[54] Robert W. Morrow, *'Sesame Street' and the Reform of Children's Television* (Baltimore, Md, 2008), p. 97.

around the country with some characters living in it with a family of puppets.'[55] Set designer, Jim O'Hare, explained how the wagon was designed specifically to allow the puppet characters to easily interact with the actors. 'At the time it was meant as an outside broadcast, so it was designed to go around the villages in Ireland. And there was a barrel here and this hole was for puppetry and that was big enough for puppetry again and there is a slit in the top there for Mr Crow and he would sit on the guttering there and look good you know and say *'cuckoo everybody'* you know.'[56] By the time Sesame Street first broadcast on 10 November 1969, *Wanderly Wagon* had been dramatizing actors and puppets alongside each other for two years, having started on 30 September 1967 and was to continue broadcasting on Irish television until 1982.[57]

Wanderly Wagon scripts called for special effects and illusions, all of which had to be achieved with meagre resources, resulting in innovative production techniques. The introduction of colour television in 1973 allowed for the first use of Chroma key editing, where foreground action could be mixed with a separate video background, providing technical illusions such as *Wanderly Wagon* flying over the Irish countryside. In the planning stages of the programme, it was suggested that Eugene himself would be ideally suited to take on the role of one of the leading characters, O'Brien, placing Lambert in front of the camera alongside his puppets.

In the programme's initial years, each episode of *Wanderly Wagon* was recorded in a single take, as live, with no editing, emulating a live theatre performance, but with the complications of puppetry and television – and trailing microphone leads. Scriptwriters included those who had previously worked in children's television, including Frank Kelly and Carolyn Swift, but also Neil Jordan, who was to go on to become an Academy-award winning writer, director and producer. Indeed, Lambert felt that Telefís Éireann missed a trick by not selling the series internationally: 'There hadn't, there wasn't a programme like Wanderly Wagon, you know, there was no other programme like *Wanderly Wagon* and it was unique in that way and we were there before the Muppets. I mean if Telefís Éireann had used their head we could have become international. It could have become an international show because it was so, it became so popular, you know.'[58]

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[55] Lambert, *Eugene's Memoir - partial unpublished memoir*.

[56] 'Pulling Strings: A Documentary on the Lambert Family' (Dublin, Ireland, 13 Jan. 2004).

[57] Michael Davis, *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street* (Illustrated edition, New York, 2011), p. 196.

[58] Lambert, 'Puppeteer & Showman: series of recorded interviews with Martin Molony, at Monkstown, Co Dublin over several dates in October 2009.'

Although *Wanderly Wagon* was the last television series for Eugene Lambert as a puppeteer, the Lambert family continued to feature on Irish television through the puppet character of *Bosco*, which was voiced initially by Eugene's daughter, Miriam and later by her sister Paula. *Bosco* interacted with two adult presenters in an educational programme for pre-school children in 386 episodes between 1979 and 1987.

Conclusion

The advent of Irish television highlighted the use of puppet drama as a form of popular entertainment. This was despite Ireland not having had as strong a history of this art form as other European countries. The initial attempts to produce puppet drama for television did not make sufficient use of the attributes of puppet performance, but as Lambert worked with Telefís Éireann, the programmes were less an imitation of human drama in miniature and more specifically a form of dramatic entertainment associated with the use of puppetry. Patrick Gilligan's consideration of children's drama on Irish television notes that while much home-produced content was restricted by a lack of sufficient resources, puppet drama programming managed to overcome this, proving an equal for their imported counterparts.[59] Lambert epitomized the kind of formal and technical innovation that could occur in spite of the relative lack of resources available to Irish practitioners. His work was far from parochial: it was an inventive mixture of Irish themes and international influences that rivalled its British and American equivalents in developing new forms of television puppetry even as it nurtured Irish cultural talent.

Eugene Lambert built on televisual experience to produce further puppet drama productions for live audiences. Having started television as a ventriloquist and Punch & Judy showman, his television experience piqued his interest in the potential for puppet drama in a theatrical setting. Together with is family of puppeteers, he produced puppet dramas for stage, the first of which was a marionette production of Oscar Wilde's The Fisherman and his Soul as part of the 1968 Dublin Theatre Festival. Voiced by actors Ann O'Dwyer, Bill Golding, Frank Kelly and Eugene himself, six of the Lambert children manipulated the puppets at performances in Dublin and Cork in October 1968, including an additional, unscheduled week at the Gate Theatre. Favourable reviews of the production emboldened Lambert to pursue the medium further and prompted him to open a permanent venue at the Lambert Puppet Theatre in Monkstown, Co Dublin in November 1972. The theatre was to provide a venue for live puppet theatre and as a base for the Lambert touring company for the following 47 years. The theatre

[59] Gilligan, 'Box of delights, bridge of feathers', p. 127.

also provided a series of one-off productions for Irish television during that time, including Red Riding Hood (1972), Bandicoot & the Egg, Hansel & Gretel, and Jack & the Beanstalk (1973), Goldilocks & the Three Bears (1974), The Spinning Wheel (1975), and The City Mouse & the Country Mouse, and The Devil's Bridge (1986). Contrary to the predictions of the ill effects of television on Irish children, Eugene Lambert's puppetry provided excitement, entertainment and education for twenty years of Irish children's television. In addition, Lambert's involvement with television gave him a particular understanding of puppetry performance, a public profile and the financial basis on which to develop a puppet company providing live performances across Ireland, lasting more than half a century. It was because of Eugene Lambert's involvement with the advent of Irish television that the Lambert Puppet Theatre became 'effectively the national children's theatre of Ireland'.[60]

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[60] McCormick, 'Lambert Theatre and Puppetry Redefined', p. 287.

5.3 Eugene Lambert Illustrations

Eugene Lambert:
Above, with vent-puppet 'Judge', outside the Lambert Puppet Theatre and below in character as 'O'Brien' in RTE's *Waderly Wagon. Courtesy of Miriam Lambert.*

Chapter 6: Findings & Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The publication of four peer-reviewed journal articles in the UK, USA and Spain featuring case studies about the puppet theatre in Ireland validates the importance and significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland's cultural history. Given the diverse nature of the case studies, their publication also demonstrates the very different ways in which puppetry performance has impacted Irish performance, entertainment and theatre and how this contributed to the development of the puppet theatre as a performance art.

Puppetry has been a form of artistic expression from ancient times in various parts of the world. While it is most closely related to popular street entertainment for the masses, it has also been an expression of high culture with performances such as marionette operas. Its significance has ebbed and flowed over the centuries as it came in and out of fashion or as it offered a suitable way in which to circumvent censorship or theatrical licensing restrictions.

This study has demonstrated that puppetry in Ireland did have a significant presence and reflected the development of the puppet theatre in other parts of the world. Additionally, some of the experimentation and innovation in Irish puppet theatre has influenced the puppet theatre of other countries, contributing to the development of the performance art internationally.

6.2 Research Questions and Contribution to Knowledge

This research sought to answer the principal question: Has the puppet theatre been a significant form of professional entertainment, performance or theatrical production in Ireland?

…and to expand on this question by addressing these sub-questions:

- What impact have individual practitioners had on the puppet theatre as an art form or performance genre in Ireland?
- What impact has Irish puppetry had on puppet performance internationally?
- How has puppet theatre in Ireland adapted to technological opportunities and challenges?

Drawing on the case studies that form the core of this research, the following sections demonstrate that the four individual studies made a highly significant contribution on puppet theatre in Ireland and internationally and that they constantly and successfully negotiated and embraced the technological opportunities and challenges that they encountered over the course their careers. Additionally, the research demonstrates that puppetry was on a par with

other art forms in terms of recognition, respectability, and audience composition. It also demonstrates that the art form had a significant cultural presence in Ireland across three centuries and that despite the paucity of work in the area, puppetry has a significant, though often unacknowledged, presence in Irish cultural history.

Overall, the four studies represent a critical mass sufficient to demonstrate that the puppet theatre has been a significant form of professional entertainment, performance or theatrical production in Ireland. As shown within each of the case studies, the impact and significance of the development of the puppet theatre in Ireland has manifest itself in a variety of ways. Stretch demonstrated how the art form could be used as an effective form of Irish satirical expression in the eighteenth century, a medium for popular entertainment. D'Arc used the medium as a very successful form of adult popular entertainment in the nineteenth century. Paine's use of puppetry brought the medium to the centre of high-culture performance in the early twentieth century, while Lambert reinvented puppetry as a successful form of television programming.

As demonstrated in the case studies, the impact and significance of puppet performance in Ireland includes the legacy left by Irish puppeteers and puppet impresarios. Stretch's eighteenth-century theatre continued for decades after his death and his impression on Swift and his circle has immortalised his satirical and political commentary. In his *Journal to Stella,* Swift had previously expressed his interest in the puppet theatre while he lived in London.[1] As *Gulliver's Travels* was published in 1726, having been written over the previous five years, one could surmise that Stretch's satirical performances might have been part of the impetus, prompting McMinn to ask 'Could puppet shows have originally suggested a Lilliputian drama?'.[2]

D'Arc's great legacy is as the founder of a marionette company that was to be the origin of most of the successful marionette troupes of the era. While his family expanded and developed his endeavours to become 'one of the greatest troupes of marionettes that have been seen in the country'[3] and 'the most influential of Victorian marionette companies'[4]. This influence went beyond that of his family. Many of those who worked with D'Arc and those to whom he sold his puppet enterprises established, or became part of, the leading marionette

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[1] Jonathan Swift and Walter Scott, *Journal to Stella (Letter I-XLII)* (1883), p. 105.

[2] Joseph McMinn, 'Swift and Theatre' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, xvi (2001), p. 42.

[3] Whanslaw, *Everybody's marionette book*, p. 17.

[4] Phillips, 'D'Arcs in Dublin', p. 34.

theatres of the period, meaning that 'most of the large touring companies of marionettes originated in some way or other from D'Arc's show'.[5]

Although primarily an amateur group, Paine's *Dublin Marionette Group* provided a fertile ground for significant artistic expression and experimentation, which was to influence Irish cultural life far beyond the puppet stage. Many of the contributors to Paine's puppet productions were skilled practitioners and built on their experiences with the *Dublin Marionette Group* to later become very successful professional actors, artists and writers.

Another aspect of the impact and significance of Irish puppet performance demonstrated within these case studies is the impact that these practitioners had on puppetry internationally. Several puppet companies and performers who started in Ireland went on to perform internationally, as in the case of D'Arc's Marionettes international tours, where they engaged with local performers and creatives in China and other distant destinations. Nelson Paine established the Nairobi Puppet Theatre after his experience with the Dublin Marionette Group, later to return to Dublin emboldened by his African experience to set up the Puppet Opera Company. Eugene Lambert's production of *Brógeen follows the Magic Tune* was RTE's first drama series to be sold outside Ireland, where it still has a Norwegian fan base a half-century later.

Other international influence came about through Irish puppet companies and individual performers taking part in international puppet festivals abroad and in providing workshops and training in various parts of the globe. International puppetry associations have featured Irish practitioners in their journals and at conferences. Irish puppeteers have taken leadership roles within international puppetry bodies, such as Union Internationale de la Marionette (UNIMA).

One of the striking aspects of the four case studies is the way in which puppetry developed or reinvented itself when prompted by technological or other challenges and opportunities. Those who embraced the art form were able to demonstrate great flexibility and agility. Puppeteers often became chameleon performers, as Punch & Judy men playing to afternoon children's audiences and ventriloquists for adult cabaret at night. They diversified from waxworks to marionettes and from ventriloquism to glove puppets. Punch started as a marionette in theatres like Stretch's Capel Street venue but was reborn as a glove puppet

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[5] Barnard, *Life and Travels of Richard Barnard, Marionette Proprietor*, p. 29.

when puppeteers needed to be mobile and easily transport their productions to reach changing audiences.

Much of the innovation employed was practical. D'Arc used his knowledge of working in wax to create puppets suitable for his purposes. The availability of recorded audio allowed puppets to recreate the remarkable performances of others who are elsewhere or no longer with us. The Puppet Opera Company performed with audio recordings of internationally renowned singers at the first and second Wexford Opera Festival in the 1950s. The Lambert Puppet Theatre has performed Oscar Wilde's *The Fisherman and his Soul* using the voices of Hilton Edwards and Michaél MacLiammóir, recorded in the 1970s.

The experimental nature of Paine's use of puppetry mirrored the revival and reappraisal of the puppet theatre that took place internationally in the first part of the twentieth century. Although the puppet theatre is often regarded as a peripheral aspect of dramatic performance, the case study of Paine's work reveals that puppetry was central to a wider form of dramatic and artistic experimentation. Paine's use of puppets attracted actors, artists and dramatists of the period to coalesce around the experimental use of puppetry as a medium with which each of them had a particular perspective. It underlined the multi-faceted nature of puppetry, combining many aspects of the human stage, but also acknowledging that the puppet theatre is a distinct art form.

The Dublin Marionette Group's use of the *Peacock Theatre* – to sold-out houses - is further evidence of both the experimentational nature of what Paine was doing and of the due regard his puppet company was given. The *Peacock Theatre* was created as an experimental performance space of Ireland's national theatre, *The Abbey Theatre* and use of the venue had to be approved by the board of the *Abbey Theatre*. Paine's later staging of opera productions at the *Pike Theatre*, where the 'intent was to subvert and unsettle expectations surrounding Irish theatre', continued that sense of experimentation.[6]

Other forms of innovation were prompted by necessity. Lambert's career illustrates the way in which puppetry can reinvent itself to make use of current and varying performance opportunities. Prior to the introduction of the Irish television service, Lambert had already reinvented himself twice. He transitioned back and forth from ventriloqual cabaret artist at night to children's puppet entertainer by day. In one interview, Lambert tells of doing seven separate performances in one day, starting with children's parties in the afternoon and

[6] Barry Houlihan, 'The Pike Theatre and Intercultural Ireland' in Barry Houlihan (ed.), *Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories 1951-1977* (Cham, 2021), p. 120.

finishing with his vent act at midnight.[7] The advent of Irish radio saw him perform regular guest spots on variety shows and later to become one half of a radio DJ duo alongside his vent-doll in *Finnegan Picks the Tune*.[8] For Lambert, television was just another medium for whatever form of puppetry might best be suited – even undertaking to produce marionette drama at a time when he had no experience of using string puppets..

Wanderly Wagon's innovation in combining puppets to perform alongside human actors – as interacting characters in a drama, presenting both as equals was before its time. This is particularly striking in that Ireland's television service started a 25 years later than the UK and over 30 years later than the US. Such a combination of human and puppet drama was later to become the hallmark of the world's most successful television puppetry in *Sesame Street*. Originally, the *Children's Television Workshop* had intended the puppet characters to be filmed separately to the actors, portraying the former as living underground and to show only human characters in street scenes.[9] By the time *Sesame Street* first broadcast in November 1969, *Wanderly Wagon* had been dramatizing actors and puppets alongside each other for two years.[10] This was a deliberate intention from the outset, with the wagon designed specifically to allow the puppet characters to easily interact with the actors.

Much of the adaptation of the art form was driven by an entrepreneurial spirit long associated with popular showmen. The account of D'Arc's management of his affairs, highlights his persistence, resilience, and survival instincts demonstrates the extent to which Victorian showmen lived by their wits. Given the peripheral nature of the puppet theatre as an art form, these attributes were much more important than they would have been for mainstream theatre and entertainments.

D'Arc's use of editorial news coverage and advertising copy illustrates the extent to which the two were inextricably linked within the newspapers of the period. His ability to recognise the news value of his story and his ability to frame his promotional material to maximise news coverage of his enterprises was remarkable. This was particularly important for the success of puppet theatre companies as mainstream theatre had the advantage of respectability and, by virtue of location, the opportunity to develop a reputation over time.

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[7] Lambert, 'Puppeteer & Showman: series of recorded interviews with Martin Molony, at Monkstown, Co Dublin over several dates in October 2009.'

[8] *Finnegan Picks the Tune* featured recorded children's music, over several seasons from 1962 to 1968.

[9] Morrow, *'Sesame Street' and the Reform of Children's Television*, p. 97.

[10] Davis, *Street Gang*, p. 196.

The Frenchman's engagement with the courts as plaintiff underlines the extent to which popular showmen had to pursue their rights and to seek opportunities in his recourse to the law. As a defendant, D'Arc's various court cases illustrate the ruthlessness of his business affairs. In both capacities, D'Arc regarded the legal system as another tool of his trade and used it in the same way as he did the news coverage and advertising copy offered by the news media of the period.

The facility for innovation and adaptation within puppetry can be explained by the absence of so many of restrictions and preconceptions associated with the human stage. If a performance calls for it, a puppet can fly, dismantle or be reassembled in full view of the audience. The distinction between inanimate and animate objects within a puppet production only exists until the object is animated. Within puppetry, it is as natural and unexpected to have a plastic dustbin talk to the audience as it is to have a doll-like wooden character do so. Human actors cannot fly and plastic dustbins who converse on the human stage are called puppets. This level of unbridled expression is inherent within puppet performance. So the question that puppeteers consider in meeting new challenges and opportunities is about HOW the situation can be advanced, not IF the situation can be advanced.

6.3 Audiences

As audiences and critics were exposed to the breadth of puppet performance, the art form gained a hard-won recognition and respectability that made it the equal of other art forms – however fleetingly. Ireland proved to be a melting pot of theatrical and performance creative artists who found an outlet within puppet performance. Actors, artists and writers found their involvement in puppetry provided them with an experimental space in which to expand their artistic experience outside of their usual environment, but which informed their own artistic practices.

These case studies belie the assumption that puppet performance is most suited as a form of children's popular entertainment. During the period of study, audiences accepted puppet performances as a suitable alternative to mainstream theatre. In the case of Stretch's eighteenth-century puppet theatre, this equivalence with mainstream theatre was significant. As theatre historian, W. J. Lawrence observed: 'The new entertainment proved so attractive to the rank and fashion of the town that the theatre in Smock Alley was deserted'.[11] The Capel Street puppet theatre provided such significant competition for the mainstream theatre of the

[11] Lawrence, 'A Famous Dublin Show'.

day that they took to the courts to have the puppets silenced.[12] The plaintiffs were significant figures within Irish society. Edward Hopkins, master of the revels, had been chief secretary to the Lord Lieutenant and a member of the House of Commons.[13] Thomas Elrington, an accomplished actor on the London stage, was deputy master of the revels, steward of the King's Inns and manager of Dublin's most prominent theatre, Smock Alley.[14] Hopkins and Elrington were not frequenters of the courts, so their legal assault on Stretch is noteworthy and demonstrates the significance of Stretch's impact on Dublin society.

While they may not have comprised mainstream theatre audiences, D'Arc's marionette theatre performed for Irish adult audiences, albeit as a form of nineteenth-century popular entertainment. However, there is no doubting the equivalence of mainstream theatre audiences for puppet performance in the early twentieth century, when Nelson Paine brought puppet opera to Ireland's national theatre, to the newly formed opera festival in 1950s Wexford and to many provincial venues with his Puppet Opera Company. This research shows that Irish puppet theatre should be considered primarily as a form of children's entertainment, but as an art form that can be used as successfully for adult theatre audiences.

6.4 Puppetry's Place in Irish Cultural History

These case studies demonstrate the impact and significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland across three centuries. Although Ireland has a richly recorded history of drama and theatre, there has been relatively little recording of matters relating to puppet performance, despite its impact on Irish social and cultural life and its contribution to the development of puppetry internationally. Internationally, puppet theatre and other forms of popular entertainment have been marginalised compared to theatrical performance. Banfield points to 'the omission of puppets from academic engagement' while Schumann describes it as 'the puppeteers' traditional exemption from seriousness'.[15] This shortcoming of historical attention to the

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[12]Edward Hopkins, Irish Master of the Revels, brought a case against Stretch on 2 December 1730, at Dublin's Court of Chancery: 'Court of Chancery Bill Books 1633-1850' (Dublin, Ireland, 3 Dec. 1730) (National Archives of Ireland, Vol 22; page 299, MFGS 57/1-32). Hopkins was joined by Thomas Elrington, Manager of Smock Alley Theatre, is listed as a second plaintiff in the continuation of the case on 8 December 1730: 'Court of Chancery Bill Books 1633-1850' (Dublin, Ireland, 8 Dec. 1730) (National Archives of Ireland, Vol 22; page 302, MFGS 57/1-32).

[13] John Bergin, 'Hopkins, Edward' in James Quinn (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009) (https://www.dib.ie/biography/hopkins-edward-a4095).

[14] Frances Clarke, 'Elrington, Thomas' in James Quinn (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009) (https://www.dib.ie/biography/elrington-thomas-a2915).

[15] Banfield, *Spaces of Puppets in Popular Culture: Grotesque Geographies of the Borderscape*, p. 2; Peter Schumann, 'The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre' in *The Drama Review*, xxxv, no. 4 (1991), pp 75–76.

puppet theatre is particularly stark in Ireland, as illustrated within the first chapter of this work.

The lack of attention given to puppet theatre and puppet performance generally can be attributed to several factors. This type of performance has morphed over time as a significant element of either low or high cultural performance throughout history, reflecting societal values, political climates, and the evolution of audience expectations. The art form has transitioned from a popular entertainment medium to a respected theatrical genre, often mirroring the cultural dynamics of its time. When human theatre was restricted by censorship or licence, puppet theatre provided an alternative platform for this material. The mobility of puppet productions more easily allowed them to adjust to take advantage of new modes of transport or performance venues, reaching new audiences more easily than human theatre. Famously, the limited facilities within Dublin's eighteenth-century marionette theatre in Capel Street was remarked upon as being suitable 'as the puppets did not require a green room'.[16]

For most of its history puppet performance was popular entertainment that served as a form of low culture, appealing to the masses and leading to its perception as less serious or prestigious as other theatrical forms. As such, the economic model for puppet theatre was precarious as discretionary spending by lower economic groups is inconsistent and unpredictable. This meant that many puppet enterprises had a short lifespan and were more easily forgotten by society. By design, aspects of puppet theatre do not make it suitable for the longer term. The ephemeral nature of the materials used meant that the puppets themselves were made from perishable materials, leading to fewer artifacts and less academic attention compared to other forms of theatrical expression.

The puppets themselves are not the only ephemeral nature of the puppet theatre. Puppet performances can be distinctive in having a high degree of audience participation where such interaction means there isn't always a definitive script. As Francis has observed: 'Much of the value of folk puppetry depended and still depends on improvisation, the puppet characters ringing changes in the script at every show…' in which case there may not be a documented script to be recorded for posterity.[17]

If the very existence of the puppet theatre was precarious and left far fewer same cultural footprints as mainstream theatre and performance, it is somewhat understandable that it

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[16] Rev S. C. Hughes, *The Pre-Victorian Drama in Dublin* (Research & Source Works Series: Theatre and Drama Series, New York, 1970), p. 19.

[17] Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice by Penny Francis - Research - Royal Holloway, University of London*, p. 60.

receives far less effective academic and historical treatment. Add to this its association with children and the outrageous all go some way to understand why it is that puppetry is regarded merely a form of diversion rather than a serious art form deserving of historical importance. That being said, as these case studies illustrate, puppet performance rarely takes place in isolation, but as part of other aspects of cultural life, which should make it easier to acknowledge as a form of cultural history worthy of remembering fully and accurately.

6.5 Conclusion

Puppet theatre has continued as an art form for centuries. This dissertation illustrates that there is a critical mass of interesting and worthwhile material relating to the historical impact and significance of the puppet theatre in Ireland. It is also clear that the art form has not been given the attention or prominence that is warranted either by its significance within Ireland or by the impact puppetry in Ireland has made internationally.

Irish cultural icons like Jonathan Dean Swift, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw have acknowledged the importance of the puppet theatre as a separate form of theatrical expression. In a letter to the Italian puppet showman in the 1920s, Vittorio Podrecca, Shaw pointed to the strength and purity of puppets as a means of expression:

> The puppet is the actor in his primitive form. Its symbolic costume, from which all realistic and historically correct impertinences are banished, its unchanging star, petrified (or rather lignified) in a grimace expressive to the highest degree attainable by the carver's art, the mimicry by which it suggests human gesture in unearthly caricature—these give to its performance an intensity to which few actors can pretend. [18]

Irish puppet performance has demonstrated a capacity to effectively engage with a range of audiences, including children and adults; working class in venues of popular entertainment and elite members of society in theatrical settings. It has proved itself capable of fulfilling many types of expression, including popular entertainment, education, theatrical experimentation and satire.

More than most forms of expression, puppetry in Ireland has found its way over and around technological changes that provided opportunities or threatened challenges. It has reinvented itself in order to make use of advances in transportation to find new audiences; to take advantage of censorship and restriction; to make itself suitable for radio and television

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[18] Shaw's letter to Vittorio Podrecca was reconstituted, with Shaw's affirmation, and reproduced as a foreword in a revised edition of Max Von Boehn, *Dolls and Puppets* (Boston, 1956), p. 5.

audiences; to work in conjunction with other forms of expression for experimentation and innovation.

One of the most prolific writers on the topic, Henryk Jurkowski observed that 'the puppet theatre revival continues to prove the importance of puppetry as a necessary branch of theatre with its own following, its own style, its own aesthetic'.[19] The twenty-first century revival of the puppet theatre is one of several that have occurred over the history of puppet performance, demonstrating the art form's significance, resilience, and innovation.

There is no doubt that puppetry will continue to enjoy periods of revival as it adjusts to new challenges and opportunities as it has done throughout its history. In a country that values artistic expression and dramatic performance, it can only enhance our cultural understanding if this art form is more appropriately considered. As Jurkowski observed, 'there have been many different stages in the history of the puppet theatre. It has passed through the hands of rogues and charlatans; it has been in the service of priests and politicians. Today we see it as an artistic theatre.' [20] In Ireland, we need to consider it as such.

6.6 Future Research

Given the amount of material within Irish archives that has yet to share its story, there are many ways in which such material could be used to present a perspective, to explain the origins of some aspect of Irish cultural life, or to resolve a long-standing conundrum. Despite having lost so many official documents relating to the history of Ireland, Irish archives provide access to material that gives life to the facts and statistics of history. These wonderful sources have been maintained and access provided so that the many offshoots of this study could be successfully pursued.

The purpose of this study was to establish if there was a significant history of puppet theatre in Ireland and, having done so, it suggests that a complete history of puppetry in Ireland should be undertaken. This might take the form of a chronological account of the indigenous and visiting puppet companies that performed in the country since the eighteenth century. Another approach might be to consider the networks of individuals that enabled the development of the art form over time.

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[19] Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of puppet theatre* (2nd ed., 2013), p. 2.

[20] Jurkowski's contribution, *The Eternal Conflict* , was part of a collection of international perspectives on puppetry compiled by *Union Internationale des Marionettes* (UNIMA), first published in German in 1965: Margareta Niculescu, *The Puppet Theatre of the Modern World: An International Presentation in Word and Picture* (1967), p. 25.

While each of the case studies featured a male protagonist, it is evident that women – particularly their wives – played an important role in the success of their endeavours. In addition, each of these women are of interest in themselves. It is not surprising that it would take a particular kind of mindset and outlook to marry a puppet impresario and so there are rich and absorbing studies to be made of these women and their contribution to the cultural history of Ireland.

The first form of puppetry on Ireland's television service was ventriloquism – by George Boyle. However, he is only one of many Irishmen who featured in this performance art over the centuries, many of whom were internationally famous – and infamous. James Burns, also known as *Shelford Tommy* was at the height of great success in 1790s Britain and was jailed for using his skills of disassociating his voice irresponsibly.[21] E. D. Davies was a nineteenth century Irish ventriloquist who had great success in the United States and Australia and who was one of the first ventriloquists to use a doll in their performance.[22] Patrick Gallagher, a nineteenth century ventriloquist performed to great acclaim throughout Ireland between 1824 and his death in 1863 was admired for his 'quaint humour, exquisite drollery, and irresistible comicality'.[23] For whatever reason, Irish ventriloquists have historically featured very successfully across the world, which is something very worthy of further research.

Although only one of the case studies in this work deals with the use of puppet performance on Irish television, indigenous puppet productions have featured throughout the history of the service, catering for child and adult audiences. There is an interesting and worthwhile study to be made of the use of puppetry on Irish television.

One of the sources of material for McCormick's *The Victorian Marionette Theatre* was research conducted by the late John Phillips into the (mainly classified) trade newspaper advertisements relating to marionette companies in Britain and Ireland.[24] Given that such advertising was the principal means of communication within the trade, there is much to be gleaned from incidental notices about vacant positions, equipment for sale or wanted, or announcements about forthcoming tours.

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[21] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford, 2001), p. 251.

[22] John Hodgson, 'An Other Voice: Ventriloquism in the Romantic Period' in *Romanticism on the Net*, no. 16 (1999) (https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/1999-n16-ron428/005878ar/).

[23] 'Death of Mr Gallagher, the Ventriloquist' in *Tuam Herald* (Tuam, 11 Apr. 1863), p. 3.

[24] John McCormick, Clodagh McCormick and John Phillips, *The Victorian Marionette Theatre* (Iowa City, 2004).

There are many opportunities for further research around the topic of puppet performance in Ireland and there is much to be done to uncover and highlight the richness of this form of cultural expression.

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