

[Ebook free] Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre

## Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre

*Michael Byrom*

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**Michael Byrom : Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Death of the clownsBy Harry EagarIn the great migration of southern Italians to America, Pulcinella, who came from Atella near Naples, failed to make it, and it is worth asking why. The Englishman John Byrom does not ask this question, but in a way he answers it in "Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre." He does explain how Pulcinella adapted to England when he emigrated there in the 18th century. He turned into Punch, but he degenerated from a scheming rebel into a silly, violent character for children in Punch and Judy shows, a popular attraction at seaside resorts still. Neither the hungry, scheming Pulcinella nor the brutal Punch appears at American beachside tourist traps. The reason, it seems, is that Pulcinella (and the many regional versions like Stentorello in Florence and most famous of all, Arlecchino in Venice) thrived only where freedom did not. The oppression of the Aragonese and Bourbons in the south, of the popes in central Italy and the Austrians in the north was complete, except for the outlet of the puppets. In England, Pulcinella had no serious purpose and was turned into a children's entertainment. In America, there was no demand for him at all. When Byrom made his investigations, in 1965-80 as background to his study of Punch and Judy, the puppet theater was dying in Italy, bringing to an end what was probably the oldest cultural custom among the Europeans. Byrom traces it to fertility rites in rural Greece many centuries before either the Iliad or the more or less contemporary events related in the Torah. The evidence is necessarily thin. But in Byrom's view, the characters migrated with the Greeks to Italy, developed in the Oscan territory, were adopted by the Romans and carried through to the present. Even though there is no direct evidence from

the thousand years between the fifth and 15th centuries. Extracting this from Byrom is not easy, as the organization of the book is haphazard. Still, the story is there, and haphazard stories are the stuff of Pulcinella. Byrom distinguishes between the rudimentary glove-puppets, who played in castelli (towers), booths set up in the squares; and the marionettes., who played in rooms (but sometimes in the open). Both used the same lazzi (buffoonery) as the human actors in the commedia dell' arte, and all used related scenarios. Those of the commedia and the castelli are almost wholly lost, but hundreds or thousands of scripts from the marionette theater exist. Byrom reprints a small selection. Puppetry survives today largely shorn of its rowdy and impoverished origins. Instead of subversive nobodies, today's puppeteers are likely to have academic backgrounds. The exceptional success of the Muppets and some shows at Disney World aside, puppetry has gone uptown. Literally. I have seen a puppet show at Lincoln Center. And, very rarely, at the shopping mall (today's equivalent of the square), but 21st century puppets have lost the political sting that sent so many of the burattinaio to jail. No longer are the puppet shows "the tribunal of public opinion," nor would even the most irascible Muppet (or Punch) be described as "a ferocious sadist dedicated to the might of the Big Stick . . . a rebel in revolt against everything including Death and the Devil."