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Puppet, Death, and the Devil:
Presences of Afterlife in Puppet Theatre

Edited by Nicola Pasqualicchio

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Death, the Devil and the Wife: *Danse Macabre* Motifs in Nineteenth-Century Puppetry, from Punch to Kasperl[1]

Abstract

In the wake of Romanticism, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the late medieval motif of the *danse macabre* was rediscovered in the knockabout scenes between comic figures of hand-puppet theatre and personifications of Death and Evil. The *Punch and Judy* shows in England, Carl Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater* in Germany, as well as the first printed Jan Klaassen plays in the Netherland, show how puppet repertoire drew on the grotesques of the *danse macabre* to refashion Hans Holbein's representation of an individual, everyday life struggle with death. The adaptation of the motif to the domestic context of the petty bourgeoisie leads to the addition in puppet theatre of a third character, more terrible than Death and the Devil, namely the hero's wife.

KEYWORDS: hand-puppetry; Romanticism; satire; hybrid genres; England; Germany; the Netherlands

> Hurra! Den haben wir jetzt! Wart', du Klapperbein[2], du sollst mir nit wieder kommen. Jetzt geht's erst recht los, denn jetzt ist der Tod umgebracht und alle Welt wird schreien: Vivat Kasperl, der den Tod bezwungen.
> Radi-ridi-rulala – rulala – rulala,
> Radi-ridi-rulala – rulala – rulala.
> (Reinhardt 1924, 76)

> [Hooray! We have him now! Wait, you rattle-leg, you shall not come again. Now it's just getting started, because Death has now been killed and all the world will shout: long life to Kasperl, the one who defeated Death. / Radi-ridi-rulala – rulala – rulala, / Radi-ridi-rulala – rulala – rulala.]

[2] *Jan Klapperbeen* is an old low German name for the Grim Reaper (Erbelding 2006, 15-16).

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1. Macabre Motifs in Puppet Repertoire

The motif is well-known in *Punch and Judy* shows and is to be found in several European traditions: the hero beats all his opponents to death, and when at last the time of his well-deserved punishment has come, he kills its supernatural executor too, be it the devil or an allegory of death in the shape of a skeleton puppet. In today's Punch and Judy shows, the original figure of the devil is sometimes replaced by a ghost (Byrom 1988, 25), who made his first appearance in the repertoire in the scenes 8-9 of the *Punch and Judy* play that was anonymously published by "Papernose Woodensconce esq." in 1854 (the play is divided into 23 scenes). It has been suggested that the ghost was a late British invention, in comparison with the Italian model of the show: however, the addition of the ghost character, especially when it precedes the final apparition of the devil (in the "Papernose" version), brings the plot of the Punch shows into close proximity to the old Don Juan plays of the European repertoire of the eighteenth century (cf. Collier 1828, 54-61 and 67), where the confrontation of the hero with the "stone guest" announced his descent to Hell in the finale.

Death and the devil had originally the same function from the very beginning: both carried away wicked people at the end of the play, and it was probably an accepted conclusion of the eighteenth century puppet shows that a villain like Punch was to suffer the same fate (Speaight 1990, 171). At least from the nineteenth century onwards, the situation changed in favour of the hero, and Punch now got rid of his "dark antagonists" (Byrom 1988, 25). The reason for this development may lay in his progressive evolution from secondary to leading role. In the repertoire from the eighteenth century, when the Italian Pulcinella or the German Hanswurst or Kasperl were for the most part still playing the role of servants,[3] the opposition between master and servant often overlapped with the contrast between tragic and comic characters, as may be seen, for instance, from the several Don Juan plays with puppets or actors that spread throughout Europe at that time. Whereas Don Juan could not escape his tragic end, his servant always survived, even though he had not necessarily been much better than his late master. As the comic character later on gained autonomy – and especially in glove puppetry, that casted different play style and repertoire – he retained this characteristic feature. He did not only survive, but fought back against the "horrid, dreadful personage[s]" (as the author of the "Papernose" play,

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[3]As for Punch: "Punch of *Punch's Opera*, the bawdy marionette shows of the eighteenth century, was certainly a star in the sense of being the star comedian, but generally speaking, his actions were incidental to the drama and had no significance in it" (Byrom 1988, xi).

supposedly Robert Brough, had the devil; Papernose 2001, 29) who crossed his way, and eventually defeated them.

An account of a Punch and Judy show from 1813 thus records the fight of the hero with both Death and the devil, which would become rather unusual in English puppet theatre:

> Death at length visits the fugitive [Punch], but Punch lays about his skeleton carcase so lustily, and makes the bones of his antagonist rattle so musically with a *bastinado*, that "Death his death's blow then received." Last of all comes the Devil; first, under the appearance of a lovely female, but afterwards in his own natural shape, to drag the offender to the infernal regions, in purgatory to expiate his dreadful crimes. Even this attempt fails, and Punch is left triumphant over Doctors, Death, and the Devil. (Collier 1828, 69)

The character thus becomes practically immortal. That he kills a ghost, and even beats death to death, is of course ironic.

The face-to-face confrontation with death on the stage of a theatre, namely in so-called morality plays, seems to be a plausible origin of the *danse macabre* motif in medieval iconography (Jugan 2021). The above-mentioned scenes might have initially operated as a counterpart to such motifs in early-modern drama. Indeed, the connexion between traditional puppet characters and sometimes very ancient representations of death has been repeatedly stressed. The cruel and somewhat devilish Pulcinella resembles the comic figure from the Atellan farce in Ancient Rome, Maccus or Pullus Gallinaceus, a hook-nosed hunchback character (Eruli 2014, 15-19). In sixteenth-century Germany, the comic character of the puppet scene was called "Meister Hämmerlein" (Master Hammer) and was even more explicitly a figure of the devil[4] (Purschke 1984, 31-2). But Meister Hämmerlein also shared some attributes with the later Pulcinella-like characters, such as a bludgeon (Punch's stick, Kasperl's *Pritsche*) and a tongue whistle, or swazzle (Kasperl is the only one who does not use this instrument). This example suggests that the comic figure of the German and Dutch traditions, unlike the English Punch (Byrom 1988, xi-xiv), is not a mere reproduction of the Pulcinella-type, but has its own origins in medieval and early modern German theatre.[5]

However, the continuity of such traditions is, in the absence of any written evidence, not to be overrated (Purschke 1984, 51; Byrom 1988, xii). The available sources already show, on the contrary, an intense circulation between the different repertoires in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,

[4] It is unclear whether the devil had its name from the puppet, or the puppet from the devil (Purschke 1984, 31).

[5] I would like to thank Lars Rebehn (Puppentheatersammlung Dresden) for drawing my attention to this fact.

and the first record of a Punch and Judy show by John Collier, based on the Italian puppeteer Giovanni Piccini's performances of the play in London in 1827, is only one late example of the numerous cultural transfers in the European culture of that time. The names of the protagonist themselves are basically loan-words: Mister Punch in London, Putschenelle in Hamburg, as well as the French Polichinelle, obviously originate from Pulcinella, whose name had become a synonym for a marionette in the European reception of Italian puppetry since the sixteenth century (Purschke 1984, 59; Bartoš 1963, 30). The question of historical continuity in puppet theatre has not so much to do with a specific character as with the confrontation of this polymorphic puppet character with death, finitude and damnation.

These closely related themes in the Christian worldview, notwithstanding their allegedly religious or mythical origins in puppet theatre (Magnin 1981, 208-20 and 281-92; Simmen 1972, 6), have, of course, undergone in the modern repertoire a process of secularisation, which led to the staging of death in a domestic context we know from the Punch and Judy shows, or from Kasperl theatre in the German speaking countries. As a result, both Mister Punch and the *Privatier* (private citizen) Kasperl Larifari, as Count Franz von Pocci (1807-1876) liked to name him, were represented from the nineteenth century onwards as petit bourgeois, living on their own: the household then became the battlefield of the protagonist's everyday life struggle with death and evil. Other opponents to the main character were of supernatural or monstrous nature, such as the long-stretching-neck individual or the "beast" that was later on to become a crocodile (for Punch as well as for Kasperl and Jan Klaassen). Most of them, however, were of a more social character. The most prominent one is the hero's own wife (Judy in England, Grete in Germany, Katrijn in Netherland), who is in general hardly an adjuvant, but rather an opponent to him. The audience could thus identify with the figures on stage, especially as glove puppetry also marked a socio-cultural difference by addressing the fairground public (Till 1986, 9-12) – a feature that Pocci's string puppet Kasperl obviously inherited from the fair shows in Munich (85-86).

This process of secularisation allows further comparison with the *danse macabre* motif (namely in the *Dance of Death* series by Hans Holbein, 1497-1543), insofar as it resulted in a similar treatment of the theme in traditional iconography and modern-times puppetry, through the combination of grotesque and death motifs. It may also more specifically explain why the early nineteenth century saw the rise of considerable interest in this kind of repertoire, the new aesthetics of Romanticism having opened minds to hybrid genres and unfixed forms of art, such as were to be found in folk culture (Eversberg 2012, 35). The very first publication of a Punch-text by John Collier (1789-1883), in 1827-28, is characteristic of contemporary book aesthet-

ics, combining the play script itself with an extensive critical apparatus and, of course, the illustrations of George Cruikshank (1792-1878). Collier's text edition, along with the accompanying commentary that sounded much like a parody of philological discourse, were regarded as an early attempt at literary forgery by an author who became famous later on for his Shakespeare forgeries (Speaight 1970, 81-2). We have to take into consideration, though, that Collier's editorial choices had to reflect a dramatic form that was no less hybrid: in comparison with classical theatre, Punch had relatively little text, and the plot was simple enough to leave room for the virtuosity of the manipulator: indeed, glove puppetry displayed a specific choreography and required specific body work from the puppeteer (Technau 1992, 39-61), which would certainly deserve a closer examination than can be provided in this article. Punch's fights were dances in any case,[6] and his final duel with the devil might be therefore considered as a modern-times *danse macabre* (cf. Erbelding 2006, 16-17).

Collier saw puppet theatre as nothing less than the heritage of medieval Mystery plays (Collier 1828, 23-4 and 28). Yet the first German puppet-play editions give an even more striking example of the use of Romantic aesthetics in the valorisation of this repertoire in the first half of the nineteenth century. The publications of the Stuttgart bookseller Johann Scheible (1809-1866) in the series *Das Kloster* (The Cloister, 1845-1850) included some of the most famous plays from the puppet repertoire in the general context of dark Romanticism. Scheible's interests as a publisher lay in folk culture and furthermore in occultism and demonology. To fit into this program, not only Faust, but also Don Juan were primarily interpreted as necromancers. As an introduction to the publication of three Don Juan plays in 1846, Scheible reproduced an article by August Kahlert. Kahlert also refers to festival traditions in Madrid in order to underline the link between the Don Juan puppet and vanity motifs:

Ein reisender [August Lewald] behauptet, daß noch heute am Fastnachts-dienstage Don Juan als Puppe vom Kopf bis zu Füßen weiß gekleidet, mit Mantel und Federbarett angethan, auf weißem Kissen knieend von vier Männern auf dem Prado herumgetragen werde. Vielleicht eine Ermahnung an das Volk, das Göttliche über dem irdischen Jubelrausche nicht zu vergessen. (Kahlert 1841, 115)
[A traveller claims that still today, on Shrove Tuesday, four men carry around a Don Juan puppet on the Prado: he is dressed in white from head to toe,

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[6] In the Hamburg version of the Punch and Judy show (see below) published by Johannes E. Rabe under the title *Putschenelle ist tot, vivat Putschenelle* (Putschenelle is dead, long life to Putschenelle), we can see Putschenelle entering the dance of two Moors before he eventually knocks them both away.

wearing a coat and feathered cap, and kneeling on a white cushion. Perhaps an admonition to the people not to forget divinity for the sake of earthly glee.]

Unlike Collier, though, Scheible, as well as Karl Simrock (1802-1876), the first editor of the puppet *Faust*, in 1846, were not so much interested in the Hanswurst/Kasperl character itself, as in the traditional, almost classic repertoire of the eighteenth century. This does not mean, of course, that there were no puppet shows in Germany comparable to Punch in England. The oldest preserved text cited by Johannes E. Rabe in his *Kasper Putschenelle* study of glove-puppet theatre in Hamburg dates back to 1840-1855, and its plot was evidently inspired by Punch (Rabe 1912, 88). The anonymous publication was accompanied by twenty illustrations, some of which were reproduced after Cruikshank (83). Yet Rabe did not believe that the Hamburg puppet tradition originated in the Punch shows: hand-puppetry had its own tradition in the German speaking countries, which was broadly known under the generic name *Kasperltheater*.[7] The face-to-face confrontation of Kasperl with Death and the devil did not at first attract the attention of philologists (Rabe published his essay only in 1912), but rather that of artists like Franz von Pocci or Carl Reinhardt. In the following discussion, we will focus on the latter's work.

2. Round Dance Between Kasperl, Death and the Devil

Carl Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater* was first published in 1852 in *Münchener Bilderbogen* (Munich Picture Sheets), a famous illustrated journal to which Franz von Pocci also contributed at the time. This work consists of a series of around forty illustrations with text accompaniment in the form of a dialogue (Reinhardt is sometimes considered a precursor of today's comic books). Although the text includes stage directions, those scenes were not actually meant to be staged, but rather to record what happened in the puppet booths, which we otherwise know only from memoirs and other testimonies. The engravings depict the characters at mid-body, like hand-puppets:

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[7] Pocci's first engagement with the Kasperl figure in the almanac *Was Du willst* (What you want, 1854; reprinted a year later in *Münchener Bilderbogen*) consisted of three plays for shadow theatre and one puppet play. The last shadow play ends in the form of a prologue: on the picture we can see people gathering around a street puppet booth. We can therefore assume that the following play, *Kasperl in der Türkei* (Kasperl in Turkey), was initially designed for glove-puppets. So was, in any case, the collection *Neues Kasperltheater* Pocci published in 1855 (cf. Purschke 1984, 53-54). This demonstrates that before his encounter with puppeteer Josef Leonhard Schmid (1822-1912), Pocci mainly associated Kasperl theatre with glove-puppetry.

unlike Cruikshank, Reinhardt does not represent the booth, and his characters are more realistic (they don't imitate puppets). Yet all the scenes are composed with two, or at the most three, characters, as if they were to be performed by only one puppeteer. The play also replicates the loose plot and somewhat disjointed style of street puppet shows, such as the British Punch and Judy shows.

Most of all, the six scenes from Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater* display a series of routines, that is, typical patterns of action: Kasperl hangs the hangman ("Kasperl als Rekrut in der Türkei" [Kasperl is a Recruit in Turkey]), the devil pops out of a box ("Kasperl und der Teufel" [Kasperl and the Devil]), Kasperl knocks Death out ("Kasperl und der Tod" [Kasperl and Death]). This last scene begins with a vignette showing how Kasperl carries to the front of the stage the corpse of the devil he has killed a few scenes earlier, and eventually throws it out of the booth, just as Punch would do. This is also the only vignette before the brief epilogue ("Kasperl macht Schluss" [Kasperl concludes]) where a detail of the puppet booth is to be seen.

In the very last vignette of the cycle, Reinhardt gives in to the pleasure of drawing how Kasperl dispatches the Death skeleton with his bludgeon. Only here the illustrations cease to represent the actual happening on the stage of a puppet theatre: in this specific case, the iconographic tradition of the *danse macabre* seems to prevail. Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death*, in particular, was widely received in the nineteenth century (Knöll, 2018) and the motifs underwent an extraordinary revival at the time (Denhez-Gabion 2000, 97). It is thus highly unlikely that Reinhardt did not bear them in mind as he drew this vignette, being obviously more interested, as a draughtsman, in the graphic qualities of the scattered skeleton than in the dramaturgical aspects of the scene. Indeed, the scene could not be performed with glove puppets, unless of course the performers used an additional string marionette for the show – a transformation marionette that could indeed recall the famous *Dance of the Skeletons* by Nuremberg painter Michael Wolgemut (1434-1519)[8] – yet Reinhardt's illustrations give no indication of this.

Death isn't the only macabre apparition the comic figure has to fight with in this cycle. Kasperl must also face two devils, which makes the occurrences of such "dark antagonists" more frequent than in any comparable play, where those characters often do not occur until the end of the play. Reinhardt actually combined various scenes from traditional puppet shows,

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[8] It was indeed a famous trick from the eighteenth century onwards. At Southwark Fair in 1752, Parsloe announced "a moving skeleton, which dances a jig upon the stage, and in the middle of his dance falls all to pieces, bone from bone, joint from joint, all parts of his body separate from one another; and in the twinkling of an eye up in his proper proportion, and dances as in the beginning." (Speaight 1990, 172)

as known from the fairs. The routine with the gallows, where the main character eventually hangs the hangman, intervenes here as a conclusion to the first episode, whereas other plays would usually set it at the end of the show, since the character of the hangman, with a specific name in the English tradition, Jack Ketch quite often announces the arrival of the devil: in an 1841 illustration from *Punch* magazine we can even see Punch hanging the devil himself, which suggests that the two characters were sometimes identical. Reinhardt's second episode is a Don Juan play in a summarised form: at the end, the devil carries Don Juan away. In what follows, Reinhardt begins to link the episodes together. Thus the devil who pops out in the fourth episode presents himself as the brother-in-law of the devil who had carried Don Juan away. Kasperl kills him and then carries his dead body to the front of the stage in the last episode, the sixth. The third and the fourth episodes feature Kasperl's wife, with appearances of her rival, Karline, in one of them, and of an indeterminate beast in the other.

Numerous reprints up to the twentieth century have made Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater* an important work in the development of puppet repertoire in the German speaking area and the Netherland (Paërl 1985, 11). It provided later playwrights (rather than puppeteers, apparently) with the basic action and dialogue patterns of the so-called traditional puppet theatre, that were henceforth available in print format. The last scene in particular contributed to the critical fortune of the work, as we can see from textual comparison with similar scenes of encounter between Kasperl (or Kaspar) and Death in more recent literature. The first lines between the two characters in Reinhardt's text are as follow:

> DER TOD [...]: Ich bin der Tod, der Menschenfresser, ra-ra-ra-ra.
> KASPERL: Ei, iß Schweinebraten, der schmeckt dir besser, ra-ra-ra-ra.
> (Reinhardt 1924, 73)
> [DEATH [...]: I am Death, the Man-Eater, ra-ra-ra-ra. KASPERL: Come on, eat pork roast, you'll like it better, ra-ra-ra-ra.]

In Frankfurt actor Alphons Müller's *Porzinelltheater* (1875), this rime is only adapted to the verse form of the play text (Reinhardt's is in prose):

> DER TOD: Ich bin der Tod und Menschenfresser.
> KASPAR: Iß Schweinebraten, schmeckt dir besser!
> (Müller 1878, 16)
> [DEATH: I am Death and Man-Eater. KASPAR: Eat pork roast, you'll like it better.]

Death then warns Kasperl or Kaspar it is time to die: he answers in the same manner that he has no time to die and begs Death to come later (in a hundred years, according to Reinhardt's version). In his version of the Faust myth *Das*

lasterhafte Leben des weiland weltbekannten Erzzauberers Christoph Wagner
(The depraved life of the once world-famous magician Christoph Wagner,
1925), German writer Klabund (Alfred Henschke, 1890-1928) rewrote this
scene in turn. He made a few alterations to the text, but held to the principle
of stichomythia during the whole exchange between the two speakers:

> DER TOD: Ich bin der Tod, der Menschenfresser. –
> KASPER (*erschreckt*): Wärst du zu Haus geblieben, wär's besser.
> (Klabund 1925, 26)
> [DEATH: I am Death, the Man-Eater. – KASPER (*frightened*): If you had stayed
> home, it would be better.]

In Klabund's play, Kasper succeeds in fooling Death so that he doesn't harm
him. The last line of the scene is even closer to Reinhardt's text, as Death
leaves the stage with the motto: "Ich bin der Tod, der Menschenfresser", and
Kasper answers: "Friß du Speck mit Klöße, das schmeckt besser!" ("Eat bacon
with dumplings, you'll like it better!"; 29).

Later authors only borrowed the dialogue patterns – the plot is entirely
different from one playwright to the next. Klabund integrated this scene
in a rewriting of the well-known Faustus play for puppets. In Müller, the
appearance of Death is part of a short play entitled *Doktor Stackelbix*, which
is reminiscent of the scene with the doctor in the English Punch tradition
rather than Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater*, where the character of the doctor
does not occur. Despite staging the Kaspar character, Müller called his play
collection *Porzinell-Theater* (*Porzinell* being derived from *Polichinelle*, and an
ancient word for a puppet in general), and thus replaced it in the broader
tradition of European puppet theatre. However, those examples show that
Reinhardt's work had by this point become part of the cultural heritage of
German playwrights for puppets. It provided a collection of reusable pat-
terns and literary topoi that were soon to be found in a series of publications,
but without any explicit reference to Reinhardt.

In the first of the short plays anonymously published by Gräbe and Hetzer
in Sonneberg, most likely in the interwar period, under the title *Casperthe-
ater* ("Casperl will Soldat werden" [Casperl Wants to Be a Soldier]), the main
character, who is represented on the first page as ventripotent and humped
like Polichinelle or Punch, encounters the devil instead of Death. The lines
are very different from the previous quotes, yet the unknown author main-
tains the strict parallelism between both speeches, as well as the character-
isation of the macabre figure through a harsh and rasping onomatopoeia
("ra-ra-ra-ra" by Reinhardt):

> TEUFEL: Ratsch, Ritsch, Ratsch. Wer hat mich in meiner Ruhe gestört. Wer
> ruft mich?

CASPER: Ritsch, Ratsch, es hat dich kein Mensch gerufen. Es war nur ein Unteroffizier.
(An., *Caspertheater*, 3)
[DEVIL: Ratsch, Ritsch, Ratsch. Who has disturbed my peace? Who is calling me? CASPER: Ritsch, Ratsch, no man called you. It was only an officer.]

In Reinhardt's play, Death says one last time "ra-ra-ra-ra" before Kasperl dispatches him with his bludgeon. In "Casperl will Soldat werden", Casper strikes down the devil and pronounces the words "Ratsch, Ritsch" himself before laying the dead body of his opponent on the edge of the puppet booth, in the traditional position (that is, as Reinhardt depicted it in his illustration): "die Beine hängen nach innwendig und der Kopf nach außen" ("the legs hang inwards and the head outwards"; ibid.). The scene does not only show a role reversal but also how Casper takes on the attributes of the devil, namely the rasping noise with which he entered the scene. The main character of this series of plays is particularly wicked and brutal: Casper proves here, like the Italian Pulcinella or the English Punch, to be as evil as the devil himself. Yet this equation also applies to the character's relation to Death. The dialogues show the reversibility of the comic figure and the personification of death he encounters. In one of the first puppet plays published in Dutch within the collection *De poppekast* (The Puppet Booth, 1852), the Death character, who presents himself incidentally as "de dood van Pierrot" ("the death of Pierrot"; Meilink 1969, 67), comes to tell Jan Klaassen that he must change roles with him. Jan protests that he is not a mere "remplaçant" (a substitute):

JAN KLAASSEN: Ben jij de dood? Zeg eens, vriend! Waarom blijf jij dan niet op het kerkhof, bij je broêrtjes en zusjes?
DE DOOD: Wij moeten verwisselen; en daarom moet jij met me meê.
JAN KLAASSEN: Wissel jij dubbeltjes… maar ik wissel niet: ik ben geen remplaçant; ik exerceer niet, ik dank je, en ik ga niet meê met je naar de kazerne.
(ibid.)
[JAN KLAASSEN: Are you Death? Tell me, friend! Why don't you stay in the graveyard with your little brothers and sisters? DEATH: We have to change; and therefore, you'll have to come with me. JAN KLAASSEN: You change dubbeltjes (Dutch coin)… but I won't change: I'm not a substitute; I won't drill, thank you, and won't go with you to the barracks.]

In the following lines, Jan Klaassen appropriates one of the epithets traditionally attributed to Death in the Dutch as well as German-speaking area:

JAN KLAASSEN: Zeg eens, vriend! wat ben jij dan, de zoete of de bittere dood?
DE DOOD: Ik ben de zoete dood.
JAN KLAASSEN: En ik ben de bittere Jan Klaassen. (*Hij neemt zijn klomp, en wil den Dood wegschoppen, die daarop verdwijnt.*)

(ibid.)

[JAN KLAASSEN: Tell me, friend! what are you then, the sweet or the bitter Death? DEATH: I am the sweet Death. JAN KLAASSEN: And I am the bitter Jan Klaassen. (*He takes his clog and wants to knock Death away, but he disappears.*)]

One is the death of the other: the characters of the puppet play are interchangeable because they have no real identity (although the rewrites of the nineteenth century endeavoured to endow the main character with national identity: Byrom 1988, xiv), they are nothing but functions in the "dramatic configuration" (Polheim 1997) of the play. The composition of the play, the interaction between the figures and the stage choreography (especially in puppet theatre) determine, in the end, who beats whom.

3. The Wife Character: Satire and Allegory

Reinhardt's plays put on stage another character with supernatural features, one whom Kasperl is probably more afraid of than Death and the devil, namely his wife. She appears for the first time in "Frau Kasperl und die Köchin" (Madame Kasperl and the Cook) and struggles against the cook Karline, to whom Kasperl has promised marriage. As usual, Kasperl settles the dispute by knocking them both out, and puts the bodies in a box which, at the end of the play, he is set to throw in the river and thus drown them. In "Kasperl und der Teufel", the devil steals the box and replaces it with another, a round one, from which he emerges and seizes hold of Kasperl. At the end, Kasperl kills him and announces his intention to burn the box. In the next episode, the supposedly dead Madame Kasperl suddenly pops out of the round box (the devil's box) and starts to hit Kasperl, calling him a "Weibertotenschläger" ("wife-killer"; Reinhardt 1924, 61). Kasperl throws her out (of the puppet booth?) along with the box. Her last appearance is at the beginning of "Kasperl und der Tod", where she announces to Kasperl the arrival of Death before running away.

The treatment of the character is particularly incoherent. The conception of the whole cycle as a collage of various scenes from the street puppet shows may of course explain such unmotivated reappearances. In "Kasperl und der Teufel", though, the comic effect of the wife popping out of a box when no one was expecting her to do so (all the more so, as she is supposed to be dead) could justify the sequencing of the scenes. These constant resurrections have above all a satirical function: Kasperl cannot get rid of his wife, although there is nobody he would be happier to get rid of. You escape Death and the devil more easily than your own wife, because a wife is hell on earth. This misogynistic motif is of course far from being new, and was already to

be found in an earlier Don Juan play (around 1813), where Kasperl, standing
before the door to Hell, bids his master farewell with the words:

> Und, g'sötzt, Ös kemmt's in d'Höll,
> Seid's meiner eingedenk,
> Und griaßt's m'r dort mei Greath,
> Dö isch g'wiss in d'Höll,
> Und sâgg's: i lâß ihr sog'n
> Daß i iaz heiret'n wöll.
> Und suach'n miaßt's Ös sie
> Bein Luzifar, ihren Hearn,
> Denn ear hât selb'r g'sâgg:
> Gleich und gleich g'sellt si gearn.
> (Kaiser 2005, 190-191)
> [And let's say you go to Hell, / Do remember me, / And greet my Grete there,
> / She's certainly in hell, / And tell her: I let her know / that I now want to get
> married. / And you have to search for her / Near Lucifer, her master, / For he
> himself has said: / Birds of a feather flock together.]

The killing and the resurrection of the wife, traditionally known as Grete,
have a long tradition in Kasperl theatre, at least in the south German area.
In Austria, glove-puppets were forbidden to speak for almost a century and
the plays therefore had no text, but the account by writer Felix Salten (1869-
1945) of the Vienna Prater shows gives us a clue about what was happening
in the puppet-booth around 1912. At the beginning of the show, Kasperl
killed his wife Grete with a hammer. It was sheer accident: the audience had
by then evolved into a children's one, therefore the main character could not
be as ruthless and cruel as before. The routine with the box was very similar
to Reinhardt's scenes where Kasperl also trapped the night watchman as he
sought to check the contents of the box. Here Kasperl inadvertently killed
the doctor and then, on purpose, the Jew to whom he intended to sell the box
with the two corpses in it: he eventually put three bodies in the box. In the
show as we learn from Salten, the devil appeared to carry Kasperl away, but
an angel came to prevent him doing so and resurrected Grete so that man
and wife could live happily ever after (Salten 1912, 116-23).

Another play from the Central European tradition by the judge August
Franz Rokos, from Cheb in Bohemia, *Der Schmied von Jüterbock und sein Ge-
selle Kasper* (The Blacksmith of Jüterbock and His Journeyman Kasper, 1922)
has a very similar scene to the one described by Salten in which Kasper acci-
dently kills his wife, puts the body in a box and then murders a policeman by
suffocating him in the box, as the latter wants to check its contents. Kasper
is then about to throw the box in the water, just like Reinhardt's character,
before the devil shows up. The main difference in Rokos' play from the pre-

vious ones, especially from the Vienna Prater show, is a significant one: it is not an angel, but the devil himself who resurrects Kasper's wife. In the following, Gretl will plague her husband so much that he wishes to die. Yet Death avoids Kasper since he had played a nasty trick on him. At the end, he still finds a way to clear himself of the policeman's murder in order to get into paradise. The conditions laid down by Saint Peter specify the meaning of the wife motif in Rokos' play, namely that marriage is purgatory:

> SKT. PETER: Ja einmal kannst du in den Himmel kommen, aber nicht gleich. Du bist im Essen und Trinken allzu unmäßig und mußt daher noch ein paar Jahrln im Fegefeuer verbringen.
> KASPERL: Im Fegefeuer? Wo ist denn das wieder?
> SKT. PETER (*lachend*): Unten auf Erden bei deiner Gretl. (*Er macht ihm die Himmeltüre vor der Nase zu und verschwindet.*)
> (Rokos 1922, 64)
> [ST PETER: Yes, you can go to heaven, but not right away. You are too intemperate in eating and drinking and must therefore spend a few more years in purgatory. KASPERL: In purgatory? Where is that again? ST PETER (*smiles*): Down on earth with your Gretl. (*He closes the doors to heaven in his face and disappears.*)]

Rokos' play deliberately borrows from several sources of alleged folk culture, starting with the subject itself, which comes from the tale "Der Schmied von Jüterbog", first published in 1836 by Ludwig Bechstein (1801-1860), whose folk tales became very popular in the nineteenth century and afterwards.[9] There is no doubt that Rokos knew about Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater*: the sequence of the box scene, with Kasperl wanting to throw it into the water, is a clear example of intertextuality. The playwright was therefore very conscious of the specificity of each repertoire when he stated, on the cover of his publication, that the play was intended for glove-puppets as well as for string-puppets. The target audience in so-called Sudetenland may have been more familiar with the latter, as both Bohemia and neighbouring Saxony were mostly famous for their carved marionettes (string-puppets; Blecha and Jirásek 2008, 40); through its connexion to the Viennese Kasperl theatre and to Reinhardt's illustrated sheets in Munich, Rokos' play also refers to the Central-European hand-puppet tradition.

In this regard, we might consider *Der Schmied von Jüterbock* as, to some extent, a reflexive work on these regional traditions. However, the connexion of Gretl with eschatological representations, such as hell or purgatory, is not a particularity of Franz August Rokos' interpretation of the older repertoire.

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[9]Bechstein came back to the theme of "Der Schmied von Jüterbog" with a tale called "Die drei Wünsche" (The Three Wishes), after which Franz von Pocci wrote one of his most popular plays.

Indeed, it was already to be found in the above-mentioned play "Langhals en de dood" in 1852. In this play, Jan Klaassen attacks Langhals (Long-neck, a neck-stretching figure who also appears as an interlude trick in the text of puppeteer Piccini's play published by John Collier) and gets hurt. He complains to his wife Katrijn, but she tells him she regrets that the blow didn't kill him, and praises the lovely funeral she would have given him. Jan wants to thank her with a blow, while Katrijn threatens him with death. The ensuing chase is described in the stage direction as follow: "Jan Klaassen neemt zijn klomp en wil Katrijn er meê raken; in eens komt, in plaats van Katrijn de Dood te voorschijn." ("Jan Klaassen takes his clog and wants to hit Katrijn with it; suddenly, Death appears instead of Katrijn"; Meilink 1969, 67).

Such an unexpected substitution produces a comical effect and has a satirical dimension too. In the play, Jan Klaassen at first still believes that he is facing his wife, uttering an ironical, as much as insulting compliment about her: "Nou ziet mijn wijf er ter dege mooi uit!" ("Now my wife looks really nice!"; ibid.) With this routine, which the spectator would at first sight perceive as a metamorphosis, Katrijn moves from the familiar, domestic sphere of the main character to that of the supernatural beings who populate the play. The character of the wife would initially embody everyday life in its most prosaic aspects: in this regard, Katrijn is not only a caricature, she is also an allegory. Therefore, there could be no better representation of what Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) called "le tragique du quotidien" ("the tragedy of everyday life"; Erbelding 2006, 25) than her being changed into Death, with the only difference that here, satire plays down the sacred significance of death, and thus deactivates its tragic effects.

In the conclusion of Rokos' play, the idea of purgatory had a similar function (satire isn't absent from the play either). Indeed, it defined an intermediate state between earthly life and the hereafter, especially since purgatory, for Kasperl, was located down on earth, by his wife. Satire brings together everyday life and supernatural elements in a similar way, enabling a hybridisation of genres that we must, however, distinguish from the aesthetics of romantic irony (Galmiche 2012, 777-81): firstly, because this tradition originates in a literary output that predates Romanticism, and hadn't much to do with the Romanticists' attempts to write for puppets (Rebehn 2021); secondly, because the first records of hand-puppet theatre texts display features that are quite opposite to the poetics of the romantic school as defined by Friedrich Schlegel, beginning with eclecticism and plurality of styles, "low mimesis" (Dimić 2010) and "sick humour" (Byrom 1988, 16).

In this regard, string-puppets seemed more easily integrated into the romantic aesthetic, as several examples would show. Heinrich von Kleist's essay on marionette theatre is probably too isolated a case to be cited here, although the dramatist's acquaintance with the poet Clemens Brentano

(1778-1842) in Berlin suggests a common interest for puppets in the romantic circles in North Germany. Brentano was indeed among the romanticists who undertook to write for puppets (but eventually gave up; Rebehn 2021), and in the endnotes to his drama *Die Gründung Prags* (The Foundation of Prague, 1814), he even compared the *Alraune* (mandrake) with Hanswurst, and, with obvious satirical intentions, Satanism with the theatre business in general (Brentano 1814, 426-427). Yet the plays for string-puppets that were published by Scheible in the above-mentioned collection *Das Kloster* still provide the best example of romantic interests for this specific type of theatre.

Reinhardt's interest in glove-puppetry represented a completely different aesthetic line, one that was devoid of romantic pathos and romantic taste for the marvellous. His work in the *Münchener Bilderbogen* has certainly more to do with the "aesthetic of ugliness", as first theorised by philosopher Karl Rosenkranz (1805-1879) one year later, in 1853: even today, German puppeteer Joachim Damm admits to being struck by the downright ugliness of Reinhardt's Kasperl pictures (Damm 2018). Nevertheless, the engagement of nineteenth century authors with glove-puppetry re-enacted medieval imagery in the same way the Romanticists purposed to do. The comments of John Collier on the Punch and Judy shows as a heritage of Mystery demonstrate that his generation was fully aware of the historical origins of glove-puppetry in the Middle Ages. To this extent, Reinhardt's *Kasperltheater* was indeed a revisited *danse macabre*, even if the sources of the nineteenth century iconography would more likely date back to the Reformation period, namely to Hans Holbein's secularised version of the theme. Given Reinhardt's artistic education in Dresden and Munich, the reference to such motifs was probably conscious.

Is then Kasperl's wife, Grete, with the mainly satirical, but partly allegorical, features of her representation on the puppet stage, a distant descendant of Brueghel's *Dull Gret*? The idea of a direct lineage is of course very questionable (Byrom 1988, xii). It is more likely that the first printed records of puppet shows in the early and mid-nineteenth century reinvented at the same time the folklore from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which would definitely be in line with the artistic trends of the Romantic period: in this respect, the engagement of writers with puppetry was truly modern. Glove-puppetry did not have the same literary qualities as the dramas for string-puppets and did not arouse the same interest among Romanticists, yet the few available textual and graphic records from that period give valuable clues about its evolution. The broad reception of Collier and Cruikshank's edition of Punch and Judy, the imitation and even plagiarism of their work in Germany (Rabe 1912, 83) and, last but not least, the similarities between Cruikshank's and Reinhardt's artistic projects suggest that

many early glove-puppet scripts were inspired by this very publication. In other countries, the texts are not available: in the lands under Austrian rule, for instance, glove-puppets were not allowed to speak. We know little, or nothing, about the Czech *rakvičkárna*, the "little coffin" theatre of that time (Blecha 1998; Zapletal 2014, 36; Kleinová 2016, 46).

The unfixed form of traditional puppet theatre, however, gave the writers room for reinterpretation of the ancient motifs. The relatively free interaction between the characters within the dramatic configuration of the shows was the occasion for many role changes, and Death and the devil themselves had to enter the dance as simply as one of the crowd: unlike the allegories of death in the medieval *danses macabres*, they were eventually defeated. Puppet theatre meets traditional iconography of the *danse macabre* insofar as both are a hybrid genre, mixing satire and allegory together. This was not the result of a continuous development, though, but that of a modern reconstruction. In puppet theatre, the nineteenth century celebrated its reunion with Death – in the words of Michel de Ghelderode[10] inaugurating the new year in the Toone marionette theatre of Brussels: "Ainsi fut retrouvée cette wandelende dood, cette mort promenante, résidu lointain des chambres rhétoriciennes qui elles-mêmes avaient adapté les peintures moralisantes des danses macabres, du Triomphe de la Mort qu'on peut voir au Prado." ("Thus came back this *wandelende dood*, this Wandering Death, a distant residue of the chambers of rhetoric which themselves had adapted the moralising paintings of the *danses macabres*, the Triumph of Death that is to be seen in the Prado"; Ghelderode 1952, 5).

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[10] The characters of Death and the devil also occur in Ghelderode's plays (Erbelding 2006, 16). A drawing with a short dialogue by Michel de Ghelderode and José Géal, *Pitje la Mort*, revisits the traditional theme of *danse macabre* by showing a Death marionette drinking beer with the marionettes of Pitje and Poeternoester (Botsford 1980, fig.11).

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