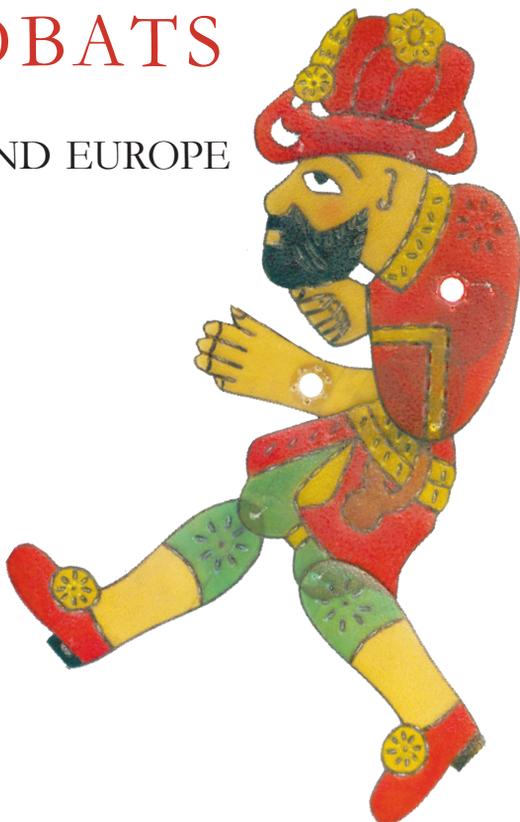




This project is co-financed by
the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

STORIES OF STARS AND ACROBATS

FORMS OF THEATRE
BETWEEN TURKEY AND EUROPE



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STORIES OF STARS AND ACROBATS
Forms of theatre between Turkey and Europe

edited by Fabio Tolledi



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the European Union and the Republic of Turkey**

Stories of Stars and Acrobats: Forms of Theatre between Turkey and Europe is promoted by the International Theatre Institute General Secretariat (France), in partnership with the Turkish Centre of ITI (Turkey), Form360 (Italy), in collaboration with the University of Salento and Astràgali Teatro (Italy). It is supported by the programme “The Civil Society Facility– EU-Turkey Intercultural Dialogue”, co-funded by the European Union and the Government of the Republic of Turkey



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Acknowledgments

The project *Stories of Stars and Acrobats: Forms of Theatre between Turkey and Europe* unites three fundamental needs of our time: it educates theatre practitioners in new and unknown theatre techniques, it results in an artistic production, it gives research information in a valuable form and it creates a foundation for friendship of individuals from different cultures.

I consider such a human, educational and artistic approach as an important step towards a rich culture and a life in peace.

I like express my deep gratitude to the European Union and the Republic of Turkey for their support, to Astràgali/Italian Centre of ITI, Turkish Centre of ITI, University of Salento, Kultur University of Istanbul and all artists, researchers, organizers and participants who made the project a most remarkable one in the history of ITI.

Tobias Biancone

International Theatre Institute (ITI)

Director General

Presentation

For over 60 years, the International Theatre Institute ITI has been active in promoting international exchange of knowledge and practice in the performing arts, furthering arts education and ultimately paving the way to mutual understanding between people. But ITI's noble mission would remain an abstract concept, were it not for numerous concrete and inspiring projects such as the one, which has given rise to this publication.

Born out of Astràgali Teatro/Italian ITI Centre's desire to share their unsurpassable passion for the living theatre and far-reaching experience of research into our common heritage in the Mediterranean region on one side, and ITI Turkey's firm commitment to a project, which both highlights and challenges elements of its theatrical tradition on the other, *Stories of Stars and Acrobats: Forms of Theatre between Turkey and Europe* fully exemplifies the mission and goals of ITI.

Combining investigation into historical and contemporary forms of theatre in Turkey and a multi-faceted International Theatre Summer School, comprising of Open and Master Classes, theatre demonstrations by Turkish and European masters, a final joint performance/theatrical intervention in a historical venue of utmost significance (Archeological Museum, Topkapi Palace, Istanbul), and a seminar with international scholars, the project brought together theatre artists and researchers from many different backgrounds and countries, including Turkey.

The main objective was to promote artistic excellence through a multi-disciplinary approach to the practice of theatre, enhance ac-

tors' training, shed light on common misconceptions about traditional forms of Turkish theatre and lay the basis for a network of professionals in the performing arts between Turkey and European countries.

Stories of Stars and Acrobats is ultimately a way to foster international dialogue, to delve deeper into our common roots in Europe and the Mediterranean in order to devise responses for addressing our contemporary socio-political concerns.

This modest research collection therefore provides a glimpse into the theatre scene of a country on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the home of three empires, currently on the threshold of the European Union. It sheds light on a country which is still as fascinating and contradictory as ever, with complexity inevitably illustrated in the dynamics of its contemporary theatre scene and the controversies, related to the status of theatres and theatre artists, as we experienced them first-hand in Istanbul in the summer of 2012 or to the perception and position of *Karagöz* shadow play theatre in society, as discussed in the research of Roberta Quarta.

The practical theatre training during the Summer School is also an indelible part and dare I even say, the core of the project.

Over the course of one month, the training brought together theatre practitioners from Turkey and all over the world for a practical investigation into the theme, underlining the process, key to Astragàli's work, deep sociological, artistic and engaged research, seeking to dispel misconceptions and ultimately challenge theatrical traditions and the art of performance.

The interdisciplinary approach is crucial to the work of Fabio Tolledi and his diverse and multi-talented team. Combining trainers, performers and panelists from different disciplines – sociology, neuroscience, “Eastern” philosophies, shamanism, different forms of theatre, poetry and music – the Master Class allowed the participants to not only connect with their peers from all over the world, learn about Turkish theatre and European tendencies, but also to

reach deep into the contradictions of present-day Western societies and Turkey, questioning for example the tenuous balance between freedom/democracy and security/control/censorship.

But above all, the common goal for the participants and trainers in the Master Class was to share their life stories, learning from the other and advancing their training as actors, developing as human beings, challenging their own preconceptions and gaining strength as actors of change in society, aware and alert, in a deep connection with their surrounding reality (politics, cultural phenomena, different art forms and societal changes).

While this would be self-evident for any artist worthy of that name, we are all sadly aware of how little of the theatrical production today really resonates with us and our present day, let alone stands the test of time.

Overall, this publication is but an attempt to combine a plethora of academic papers, articles, personal testimonies on the topic of Turkish theatre and its perception in Europe and to add to the collection of the Fondo d'Amico at the University of Salento, Italy, useful to researchers on theatre in Turkey worldwide.

Special gratitude to all partners and collaborators in this project who made the Summer School and this publication possible!

Petya Hristova

Project coordinator

Director for International Development (ITI)

Acknowledgments

The research at Fondo Silvio D'Amico of University of Salento

The present research was conducted at Fondo D'Amico of University of Salento, an important library fund full of precious bibliographic and documentary materials on theatre and the performing arts. It collects almost 7000 volumes, including publications, monographs, magazines, documents, photos and other materials belonged to the Library of Encyclopaedia of Performing Arts, edited by Silvio D'Amico, and bought by the University of Salento in 1971.

My acknowledgments go to the Department of History, Society and Human Studies of the University of Salento, in particular to its Director Prof. Vitantonio Gioia and to Prof. Mariano Longo, scientific coordinator of the research, for giving the opportunity to make a research on such a significant topic, whose importance is also related to the enhancement of Fondo D'Amico.

Special thanks go to Donatella Grasso (University of Salento), director of Fondo D'Amico, whose kind availability and collaboration during the whole implementation of the research, allowed its best fulfilment.

My acknowledgments are also for: the Italian Institute of Culture in Ankara (Turkey) for the provision of two important publications on the relations between Turkish and Italian theatre; to the master of shadow theatre Franco Ferramosca, for providing some precious materials about Turkish shadow theatre; to the actress and scholar Camille Thomas for her translations from German to Italian.

Turkish shadow theatre

Karagöz - comicity and nomadism

Roberta Quarta

In search of Karagöz: theories on Turkish shadow puppet theatre, its birth and legend

Many are the legends on Karagöz and many are the theories regarding its “origins” (in itself, the matter of origin is tautological, and thorny, still a matter which distils a crucible of cogent questions and issues), increasing the charm of this nomadic figure, tracing intersecting ways between the Near and Far East, reaching Egypt and the whole Maghreb, into Europe two ways, through the Balkans and through Spain.

Ways, paths, routes, *Latcho Drom*, Silk Road: there is no certain evidence which can fix the shadow of Karagöz to this or that location, but there is a constant interlacing of nomadic routes, Turks were themselves a nomadic people, hailing from Central Asia into Anatolia, and hence extending far beyond.

Scholars in their majority seem to agree that shadow puppet theatre was born in the Far East, particularly in Java, India, China, extremely vast and diverse territories. How it reached the Near East, however, remains a matter of debate.

A principal theory held by the German scholar Richard Pischel¹,

¹ The theories of Richard Pischel and Georg Jacob are quoted by Metin And in several of his works, among which *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editons Dost, Ankara, 1977, p. 26. According to And the two most important works by these scholars are the following: PISCHEL R., *Die heimat des Puppenspiel*, Halle, 1900 and JACOB. G., *Geschichte des Schattentheaters*, Hannover 1925 (1st edition published in Berlin, 1907).

and elaborated further by Georg Jacob, asserts the importation and dissemination of Indian shadow puppet theatre by gypsies hailing from North West India over one thousand years ago, nomads who, in the course of their long travels, journey all the way across Central Asia to finally reach Europe.

Pischel's theories are taken up by the American scholar and puppeteer Helen Haiman Joseph², who makes observations which could furnish an interesting contribution to this debate.

Helen Joseph highlights that Indian theatre plays, according to the tradition of nomadic theatre makers, were transmitted orally, and that many of these plays have been lost. A very ancient figure of Indian art, however, has survived: the figure of *Vidushaka* the buffoon, a clumsy hunchbacked fool, with protruding teeth.

This figure, according to Pischel, might have accompanied the migrating gypsies, and could have been transformed into the Turkish *Karagöz* (spreading also in Persia, Arabia and Egypt), to then migrate to Europe across the Balkans (as the comic ancestor of Hanswurst e Kasperle).

The Turkish scholar Metin And takes up this theory³ on the *cigány* origins of *Karagöz*, underlining that the protagonist of Turkish shadow puppet theatre, *Karagöz*, is in fact a gypsy. Moreover, both in popular legend and in historical sources, *Karagöz* is portrayed either as a blacksmith or as a travelling vendor, trades which are typical of gypsy communities also in Turkey. A description provided by Metin And portrays a figure dressed as a gypsy selling tools.

The seventeenth century Ottoman writer and traveller Evliya Çelebi, author of the famous *Seyahatname* (book of travels), affirms that *Karagöz* was a gypsy, a mellifluous and cunning swindler, a

² JOSEPH HELEN H., *A book of marionettes*, B.W. Huebsch, New York, 1920.

³ AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, p. 27. By the same author, see also *Drama at the crossroads - Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991, pp. 9-10.

prankster who lived near Edirne, employed as a messenger, and dispatched once a year by the Selguicide Sultan Alaeddin to Konya, where he measured himself in comic competitions against Hacivat.

According to Metin And, however, Çelebi's theory is questionable on account of the fact that shadow puppet theatre was known only in South East India and in the countries of South East Asia.

Further support for the theory that shadow puppet theatre was introduced by nomadic gypsies comes in an observation put forward by Keith Rawlings⁴. The most important variety of pictorial storytelling in Rajasthan (the region in North East India from which the migration of gypsy populations started) is the *par* (or *para*), which consists of a vast piece of cloth, with paintings which develop a narrative.

In that area of North East India, performances were held nearly always in the evening and a lamp was used to light up the various episodes painted on the *par*, following the story line. The use of the lamp in the *par* relates to a central element in the birth of shadow puppet theatre.

Many scholars of Indian folklore have noted that these paintings show a remarkable resemblance with Indian shadow puppet plays, to the point that some would hold that the figures of shadow puppet theatre were drawn from *par* paintings.

The other major theoretical line regards the importation of Turkish shadow puppet theatre from Egypt, basing its hypothesis on a number of elements. To begin with, the fact that historical documentation of shadow puppet theatre in Turkey dates back to the sixteenth century, whereas in Egypt documentation dates back to twelfth century.

The first reference in Egypt concerns the Mumluk Sultan Salah El-Din El-Kalyouby, who is recorded to have shown in 1171 a

⁴ RAWLINGS KEITH, *Observations on the historical developments of puppetry*, 1999, available online: <http://pages.citenet.net/users/ctmw2400/index.html>

shadow puppet play to his reluctant grand Vizier⁵.

The famous thirteenth century collection of three *canovacci* (dramatic plots) written by Muhammad Ibn Daniyal⁶, an Egyptian doctor of Iraqi origin (who died in 1311) is the only written document we have of a shadow puppet theatre which, armed with laughter, challenges the boundaries between “licit” and “illicit”.

The work of Ibn Daniyal appears to be the fruit of the cultural syncretism pertaining to the Mamluk epoch, a syncretism which fuses the pagan spirit of pre-Islamic literature, a nocturnal form of entertainment, with the proverbs and satires of Persian, Greek and Indian origin.

In line with this hypothesis, shadow puppet theatre would have been imported to Egypt from Java, where Arab merchants had established lucrative colonies and commercial activities, and from Egypt it would have been subsequently brought to Turkey.

A reference in this regard may be found in the *Tarih-i Misr* (the Egyptian chronicle) by Muhammed Ibn Ahmet Ibn Iyas, a witness of events. The Sultan Selim I, who had annexed Egypt to the Ottoman Empire in 1517, had condemned the last Mamluk Sultan, Tumanbay II, to death by hanging. From his palace on the banks of the river Nile, the Sultan Selim I watched a shadow puppet play staging the hanging of his adversary and he was gratified to the point that he covered the puppeteer in gold and invited the latter to go to Istanbul with him, so that his son (the future Suleiman the Magnificent) could also enjoy watching shadow puppet theatre.

⁵ FAN PEN CHEN, *Shadow theatres of the World*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», vol. 62, 2003, p. 30.

⁶ For a comprehensive study of the figure and writings of ibn Daniyal see CORRAO FRANCESCA M., *Il riso, il comico e la festa al Cairo nel XIII secolo - Il teatro delle ombre di Ibn Daniyal*, Istituto per l'Oriente, Roma, 1996. Other written documents from Egypt include the *li'b al-manarah* (XVI century, on the light-house of Alexandria) and the *li'b at-timsab* (game of the crocodile) quoted by R.E., Karagöz, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, p. 881, (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

There are, moreover, several sixteenth century Ottoman documents which certify the presence of Egyptian artists in Turkey.

Metin And⁷ also underlines the structural similarity – a structure typically divided into four parts – between, on the one hand, *Karagöz* and *Orta Oyunu*, and, on the other hand, Javanese *Ludruk* (a form of improvised comedy).

Each of these theatrical forms is actually divided into four parts which vary from performance to performance and which are essentially independent from each other. In Javanese *Ludruk*, the comedy opens with a dance called *ngremo*, performed by a dancer clad in a bizarre outfit which recalls the very important figures of the *Curnanabaz*, dancers pertaining to the first performances of *Orta Oyunu*. The second part of *Ludruk* is the *dagelan*, in which the principal buffoon sings and recites a monologue, subsequently to engage in a dialogue with a second buffoon. This part is similar to the *mukaddime* (prologue) and to the *muhavere* (dialogue), present both in *Karagöz* and in *Orta Oyunu*. The third part, the *selingan*, is a kind of comic sketch and it corresponds to the *ara muharevesi*, an interlude followed by the main action, *tjerita*, which in *Karagöz* and *Orta Oyunu* is known as *fasıl*.

Anatolian culture emerges as an authentic crossroads of cultures, layered century after century via the various migratory waves (from Central Asia) and via the numerous conquests which subjected it to the most disparate populations. Not to forget that, before settling definitively in Anatolia in the eleventh century⁸, mixing with the people of the place, Turkish (Uralo-Altaic) populations hailed from Central Asia. In this sense, their cultures had profound connections with ancient Chinese and Tibetan cultures. It is precisely via this

⁷ AND METIN, *Drama at the crossroads-Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991, pp.10-11.

⁸ With the advent of the Selgucide Empire and the deep crisis of the Byzantine Empire, confirmed beyond doubt with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

relational, migratory dynamic that animistic and shamanic practices played a fundamental role in Turkish culture and in its performing arts tradition⁹.

Suffice it to point out that the Turkish word *oyun*, which denotes “play, theatre, dance and game”, is also the name given to the exorcising shaman, as well as to a ritual ceremony including dances, music, dramatic actions, mime and the presence of ventriloquists.

The most popular legend on the birth of *Karagöz*, the Turkish shadow puppet theatre, of which various versions exist¹⁰, appears to be strongly related to shamanic culture. According to this legend, a mosque was being built in Bursa (first capital of the Ottoman Beylik in 1326) during the reign of Sultan Orhan (1326-1359).

Karagöz and Hacivat worked in the building yard: the former as a blacksmith, the latter as a stone mason. The two companions entertained everyone with their jokes and witticisms, to the extent that one time the work on the mosque was interrupted, because all stopped working in order to hear their funny stories. The Sultan got so angry that he decided to condemn them to death, cutting their heads off (according to a version quoted by Metin And, the two were hanged)¹¹. The Sultan, however, was subsequently overwhelmed by remorse, and one of his servants, Sheik Küşteri, thought of reviving

⁹ In this regard see AND METIN, *Turchia*, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, p. 1167 (Fondo D’Amico-Università del Salento) and AND METIN, *Drama at the crossroads-Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991. Moreover, for a panoramic perspective on the complex shamanic practices in Asia and their influences on the theatre forms of various regions see NIESSEN CARL, *Handbuch der Theater-Wissenschaft*, Verlag Lechte, Emsdetten, 1958 (for the section on performing arts in Turkey see pp. 1239-1254) (Fondo D’Amico-Università del Salento).

¹⁰ For an account of the several versions of these legends see FLÖGEL KARL. F. - BAUER MAX, *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*, G. Müller, München, 1914, p. 3, and AND METIN, *Théâtre d’ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, pp. 41-43.

¹¹ The relationship between the legend of Karagöz and the metaphorical-mystical equivalent of “losing your head” in the poems of the Persian Sufi poet Farid Al-Din Attar is of particular interest.

the two comrades by setting up a screen on which the figures of poor Hacivat e Karagöz were projected.

In the Turkish tradition, Sheik Küşteri is considered to be the discoverer and patron of shadow puppet theatre. He is often invoked in the prologue and may have actually been a dervish of Persian origins from Bursa. The screen on which the shadows are projected is called Sheik Küşteri Meydanı. Metin And underlines the role of Sufis in the promotion and dissemination of shadow puppet theatre: «The most conspicuous example of the reaction to Islamism is provided by the images of *Karagöz*, the shadow puppet theatre, which was sanctioned, in contrast with the disapproval of stricter Muslims, by the Sufi sect and broadly disseminated in the neighbouring countries.»¹²

A variation of this legend on the origin of Turkish shadow puppet theatre¹³ narrates how the Sultan, threatening the death penalty, ordered his Vizier to resuscitate his two fools, Karagöz and Hacivat. The Vizier went to a dervish for help and the latter caught two big fishes, skinned them, gave them human form and put them up behind a curtain¹⁴.

An analogous legend exists in the Chinese tradition¹⁵ (also present

¹² AND METIN, *Turchia*, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, p. 1167 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

¹³ See FLÖGEL KARL. F. - BAUER MAX, *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*, G. Müller, München, 1914 (Fondo D'Amico - Università del Salento).

¹⁴ In other versions, the epilogue of shadows disappears from the episode of Karagöz and Hacivat. In one version Küşteri showed yellow slippers instead. In yet another version, having been executed by Vizier and not by the Sultan, the two comrades picked up their heads under their arms and went straight to the Sultan in protest.

¹⁵ There are many similarities between the Turkish and the Chinese shadow puppet theatres, especially with regards to puppet manipulation techniques, the transparency and dimension of the of the figures and the fact that they are coloured. In this regard see the interesting comparison made by the Chinese scholar Fan Pen Chen between the main figure in the shadow puppet theatre of North-East China, Big Hand, and *Karagöz*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», vol. 62, 2003, pp. 41-

in Java), tracing the birth of shadow puppet theatre back to a certain Sha-weng who, hiding behind a curtain which served as a screen, projected the image of emperor Wu's favourite – the girl had died recently and was the object of desperate mourning.

Another legend on the origin of shadow puppet theatre¹⁶ speaks of an awfully corrupt administrator who lived in Istanbul. A man wished to inform the Sultan of the officer's bad administration and seeing that he could not reach the Sultan in person he decided to put up a shadow puppet play in the hope that the Sultan would attend. The Sultan did in fact show up, he recognised the bad administrator portrayed in the play and punished him, whereas he conferred upon the organizer of the performance the honorary title of Vizier.

According to Metin And, the lack of evidence for the existence of shadow puppet theatre in Central Asia and in Persia sheds some doubt on its direct provenance from China, across Turkestan, which may have been, however, the place of origin of string puppet plays.

Other scholars are of a different opinion¹⁷, holding that the Turks of Central Asia mention the “game of shadows” since the twelfth and thirteenth century, during the Seljuicide reign and after the Mongol invasion. The latter brought shadow puppet theatre to Anatolia, in the territories won over from the Byzantines.

It was called *kbayāl* (“figure, image”) or *bayal*, and shadow puppet theatre was known specifically as *kbayāl az-ḡill*.

According to Metin And, confusion in the use of the two terms *kbayāl* and *kbayāl az-ḡill* resulted in erroneous interpretations which may mistaken records of string puppet theatre in Turkestan (*cadir bayal* or “spectacle under the tent”) with testimonies on shadow

42.

¹⁶ For different versions of the foundation legends of *Karagöz* see FLÖGEL KARL F. - BAUER MAX, *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*, G. Müller, München, 1914, pp. 2-5 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

¹⁷ ROSSI ETTORE, *Karagöz*, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, pp. 881-883 (Fondo D'AmicoUniversità del Salento).

puppet theatre.

The scholar Fan Pen Chen¹⁸ furnishes a comprehensive review of the debate between Esat Sabri Siyavusgil and Metin And. Contrary to And, Siyavusgil held that shadow puppet theatre was practiced by the Turks of Central Asia starting from the twelfth century. Moreover, Fan Pen Chen highlights that the use of flat figures made of leather, felt, paper, fabric or bark, common among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, may have been related shamanic practices.

The scholar mentions another Chinese source dating back to the Song dynasty (960-1279), quoting a source of the Tang era which reports that the Turks of Central Asia worshipped figures representing divinities and preserved in leather bags. Until recently such practice could still be traced among Turkish and Mongol populations. These sacred figures represented ancestors and deceased relatives. The Manchurian populations of North-East China used figures made of tree bark and paper during their shamanic rituals and animal figures during burial ceremonies. Even so, certain proof that shadow puppet theatre may have originated among the nomadic populations of the steppes of Central Asia is still difficult to obtain.

Finally, it is interesting to note the importance of certain Persian and Turkish literary sources which refer to shadow puppet theatre already in notably remote times, providing testimony of the ancient knowledge of this practice and of its strong magical and symbolical value. In the poem quoted below¹⁹, attributed to Birri, a thirteenth century Turkish writer from Anatolia, shadow puppet theatre becomes a metaphor of the Universe and of the grandeur of God.

The poem ends with an exhortation to watch and draw wisdom from shadow puppet theatre. Assuming that the source is authentic,

¹⁸ FAN PEN CHEN, Op. cit, in «Asian Folklore Studies», vol. 62, 2003, p. 25-64.

¹⁹ SAVARESE NICOLA, *Il Teatro al di là del mare - Leggendaro occidentale dei teatri d'Oriente*, Studio Forma, Lodi, 1980, p. 12 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

it is also important to note the reference to Seyh Küşteri, who was mentioned in relation to the birth of shadow puppet theatre before the fourteenth century, the period of the famous Bursa legend, the foundation myth of *Karagöz*, as well as of the first written records dating back to the sixteenth century.

Watch with your own eyes, wise man, those who
seek the truth,
and admire the skies there where the theatre tent
has already been raised.
Contemplate what the Puppeteer
of the Universe, from behind his screen,
shows you through the shadows of men and women
he has created.
It is He who, assigning a gait
to each one,
makes every figure speak in a language proper to it.
Look: all of these figures are but
appearances,
and it is the wrath or beauty of God which is
manifested in them.
Contemplate this spectral screen and do not
forget that
He who has hoisted it can always destroy it,
and all that remains of it is Him, always, anyhow.
It is given to the initiated to pantheism
to comprehend all of this,
and those who are unable to rid themselves of
plurality
will never appreciate the sense of my words.
Seyh Küşteri has shown us the sense of unity
and of plurality.
Oh Birri, contemplate the shadow puppet theatre
wisely and draw benefit from it.

Furthermore, the scholars Pertev Boratav²⁰ and Fan Pen Chen²¹ refer to the Persian Sufi poet Farid Al-din Attar (12th to 13th century) who in *Ushtur nama*, a work attributed to him, mentions a master shadow puppeteer he had seen at Khorasan (in East Iran, residence of nomadic tribes hailing from Turkestan) who in his eyes becomes the symbol of divine authority on the destiny of mankind, reflecting his mystic vision of the world. Again it is Boratav who provides, moreover, a description of a puppet play by Kashimi, published in *Futuwwat nama* (a fundamental text for Persian Sufism). In this text the play becomes an expression of the divine plan for the world.

I would like to conclude this nomadic journey through the shadows of theatre with some verses drawn from *Rubaiyat*, a poem by the famous mystic Persian poet Omar Khayyam (c. 1050-1123):

We are nothing but a moving row
of magic shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with Sun-illuminated lantern held
at Midnight by the Master of the Show.

The character of Karagöz – a rascal, more profane than divine

The protagonists of Turkish shadow puppet theatre are Hacivat and Karagöz. They form a comic couple, the pivot of the vicissitudes which make up the loose narratives of Turkish shadow puppet theatre.

Clearly, the character which lends this form of theatre its name is Karagöz, literally “black eye” (from the Turkish *kara*, “black” and *göz*, “eye”).

The Turkish scholar Metin And²² highlights the difficulty

²⁰ BORATAV PERTEV N., *Karagöz*, *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, Tome IV, 1989, pp. 601- 603.

²¹ FAN PEN CHEN, Op. cit., in «Asian Folklore Studies», vol. 62, 2003, p. 25-64.

²² AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, p. 44.

encountered in the attempt to establish the etymology of Karagöz. In reference to Turkish shadow puppet theatre, the term emerges only beginning with the 17th century, i.e. five centuries after Egyptian records of the figure of Karakush²³ (which is again of Turkish origin and literally means “black bird”). This was the Turkish name of an Egyptian Vizier called Baha-ed-din Karakush, close to the renowned ayyubid Sultan Saladin (1171-1193), who assigned him an important appointment in Egypt.

The name acquired notoriety through a pamphlet dating 1209-121? and entitled *The book of the empty spirit*, concerning the man called Karakush. In it the author, Ibn Mannati, hurled abuse at Karakush, subjecting the great warrior to ridicule and treating him as an imbecile. Karakush therefore became the protagonist of several folk tales, depicting him as a gross and stupid character.

By all means a comic antihero, which inevitable recalls a corollary of characters pertaining to the traditions of Western comic theatre: from Zanni to Pulcinella and Arlecchino in *Commedia dell'Arte*, from Punch (England) to Guignol (France), from Pickelherring to Old-Vice, not to forget the ancient Atellan mask of Maccus.

Karagöz is not a well-mannered character and expresses a rather basic, popular humour. Like all the protagonists of Western comedy just mentioned, he is a marginal figure, always looking for work. He is a trickster, often falling victim of his own pranks, with a particular propensity for getting into trouble. The deuteragonist Hacivat (a possible translation of this name from Turkish could be “Cevat the pilgrim”), companion and sidekick to Karagöz, is a reasonable and socially respectable figure, but also an individualistic and miserly fellow. He boasts his cultural superiority with continuous citations in Arabic and Persian. Reluctantly, he often finds himself involved in embarrassing situations due to the exuberance of his friend. At the end of each episode he prays the public to pardon the embarrassing and outrageous behaviour of Karagöz.

²³ AND METIN, *ivi*, p. 43.

Another element worth noting is the comic dynamic of the couple. The figure of Hacivat provides a continuous counterpoint which renders our antihero Karagöz even more ridiculous, “extraordinary”, outside the boundaries of common sense.

Karagöz is not a type of extraordinary character. Whereas the epic hero is characterized by his exceptional behaviour, distinguishing from the crowd and highlighting his virtue, the comic antihero emerges definitely as an ordinary type. He is the lay man, rather lacking in talent and, in the case of Karagöz, excessively coarse and rough. In spite of being a socially alienated, lower class figure, Karagöz always ends up at the centre of events and his actions ultimately take on an extraordinary quality. Such attributes derive from an action dynamic which subverts established social norms and, in an irresistible comic wave, drags with it both characters from everyday life and fantastic creatures, such as genies, demons and witches.

True to his role of comic hero, Karagöz thinks, plans and puts his projects into action.

From the ability to fly, to his transformation into an animal or an object (a bridge, a pole, etc.), from his ability to extend parts of his body to the exercise of magical powers – he alone is capable of undertaking such tasks, manifesting his exceptional qualities. Karagöz's *vis comica* can explode in the unpredictable, in jest, in double entendre, in the outburst of a inhumanly high pitched cry, in somersaults, a nosedive from the sky, in hybrid form, half animal half human...

A “carnavalesque” agent of subversion, Karagöz fully expresses the spirit of the jester and the buffoon, figures which have had a very important role in the rich theatrical culture of Turkey.

Karagöz fuses and mixes elements from popular performance traditions, from music, from the art of miniature painting, from poetry and the oral tradition of storytelling (*meddah e aşik*), from the

puppet theatre called *Kukla* (even in Turkish hand puppet theatre the protagonists are a comic couple, Ihtyar the old man and Ibis his servant).

The term *Karagöz* and the term *kukla* (puppet), as illustrated above, both appear²⁴ for the first time in the 17th century. As reported in a number of sources, jesters were known by various names, such as *nemid*, *şirinkar*, *mukallid*, *mudbik*, *binava* (a Persian name denoting different meanings)²⁵.

The *Nekre*, buffoon figures which frequented traditional Turkish theatre, entertained the spectators with their tricks during the exhibition of dancers (*çengis*, nearly always men disguised as women, known also as *köçek* or *tavşan*) and *Curcunabaş*. Clowns, buffoons and jesters gave displays of comic dance, sometimes wearing masks. Their grotesque and obscene ways, sparking striking comic effects, contrasted with the graceful and sensual dance of the *çengis*.

«Generally speaking this form of dance was called *curcuna*, which means more or less ‘drunken revel’, and the performers were called *curcunabaş*»²⁶. The latter were connected to the dancers and made part of the same companies of acrobats and tumblers. Shows always fused dance with music, theatre and acrobatics, elements of the same performative context.

Jesters wore pointed hats (typical of the buffoon also in other theatrical cultures) and lively coloured, grotesque costumes, sometimes accompanied by animal masks.

The Museum of Topkapi Palace in Istanbul²⁷ preserves the

²⁴ AND METIN, *Drama at the crossroads - Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991, p.149.

²⁵ For other aspects of the comic tradition in Turkey see AND METIN, *Turchia*, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, p. 1168.

²⁶ AND METIN, *Drama at the crossroads - Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991, p.101.

²⁷ Of particular interest, among the iconographic sources studied, is a catalogue of the works of the famous Ottoman miniaturist Abducelil Lévni: IREPOGLU GUL, *Lévni: Painting, poetry, colour*, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Istanbul, 1999. The works of Lévni are preserved at the Topkapi Palace National Museum

splendid miniature paintings of the *Surname*, the books of feasts, depicting buffoons, jesters, clowns, conjurors and dancers performing at the sumptuous feasts organised by the Sultans. What immediately strikes the eye is an extraordinary kaleidoscope of colours, gestures and postures, all signs of an impressive variety of performing arts, eluding the most common classification criteria, enjoyed during the Ottoman period²⁸.

Comic forms, therefore, are a central element of the syncretic Turkish theatre culture. Another principal expression of this rich tradition is the *Orta Oyunu* (from *Oyun*, meaning “representation, spectacle”, and *Orta*, “middle”), a form of popular “improvisatory” theatre, with records dating back to the 16th- 17th century. It is related to the monologues and parodies of the *meddah* (storyteller) and trasposes the comic duo of Hacivat and Karagöz onto the stage, with the presence of actors in flesh and blood playing the respective characters of Pişekar and Kawuklu²⁹.

Let us however return to our anti-heroes, Hacivat and Karagöz. Ambiguity is another essential trait of Karagöz, of the comic dynamics of this character. Karagöz fuses negative and positive characteristics, generosity and cunning, *naïveté* and obscenity, courage and fear, a mix in which positive and negative are inverted and which render a univocal “interpretation” of the character in Tstanbul. One of the most important collections of shadow puppwt theatre figurines is preserved at the same museum.

²⁸ See also DUMUR GUY (ed.), *Historie des spectacles*, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Paris, 1965 (Fondo D’Amico-Università del Salento).

²⁹ For general information on this very important form of comic spectacle in Turkey see ROSSI ETTORE, *Orta Oyunu*, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, pp. 1405-1407. For further reading we recommend the following works by the Turkish theatre historian: AND METIN, *The Turkish Folk Theatre*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», n. 38, 1979, pp. 155-176; AND METIN, *Orta Oyunu* in McGraw-Hill, in *Encyclopedia of World Drama*, Library of Congress, 1984; AND METIN, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu*, İnkilâp Kitabevi, Istanbul, 1985; AND METIN, *Drama at the crossroads - Turkish performing arts. Link past and presente, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991.

difficult to achieve. A hybrid anti-hero, capable of transforming himself, of undergoing incredible metamorphoses. He may take on divine qualities or, as it is more often the case, animal traits, not only via comparisons and metaphors, but, as already noted, really turning himself into this or that animal³⁰.

The ambiguous, contradictory characteristics of Karagöz incarnate what some have defined as the “allomorphism” of the comic hero, who revels in undertakings which surpass all ordinary logic.

But comic figures live at the margins, capable as they are to actuate, via paradoxical and incredible actions, a reversal of ordinary order and understanding - they operate in a dimension which subverts reality, actually redefining the characteristics of reality in ways which are anti-realistic, surreal, magical, i.e. in the creation of an altered “reality”³¹.

«Various elements indicate that political and social satire were at the basis of the first *Karagöz* plays [during the Ottoman empire], at least until the epoch of the Sultans Abdülaziz and Abdülhamit II³², when censorship became very strict»³³. There are several records of performance which targeted political figures, high dignitaries,

³⁰ How not to recall the comic duo of “Aristophanic heroes”, Pisthetaerus and Euelpides, who are transformed into birds in the ancient comedy which bears the same title, *The Birds*.

³¹ For an analysis of important aspects of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, among an extensive bibliography on the subject, we suggest TESSARI ROBERTO, *Commedia dell'Arte: la Mascherae l'Ombra* (1981), Mursia, Milano, 2009. On the connection between *Karagöz* and *Commedia dell'Arte*, see AND METIN, *Drama at the crossroads - Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991, p. 97. For a study on the relationship between Italian and Turkish theatre cultures, particularly in modern and contemporary times, see the work by the same author: *La scena italiana in Turchia, La Turchia sulla scena italiana*, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Ankara, 2004. (Special thanks go to the Italian Cultural Institute of Ankara for the kind availability).

³² Abdülaziz reigned from 1861 to 1876; Abdülhamit II was his successor in 1876 and was dethroned in 1909.

³³ AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, p.105

foreign ambassadors, ministers, the Sultan even³⁴. Political satire and popular feelings against the abuses of power were expressed by means of a corrosive comedy, which could hurt the “sensitivity” of power and of authorities which were not exactly lenient.

The obscenity of Karagöz

A fundamental trait of Karagöz is his outrageous and licentious behaviour, liberating an obscene attitude which, although it is not limited to the aspect of erotic and sexual exuberance (it is also expressed, for instance, in verbal and physical violence), in the latter it finds an exhilarating and powerful expression.

Here we come to one of the aspects, in fact one of the most debated transformations of Karagöz, which still survives in a number of images³⁵ and of which there is ample documentation in the chronicles of Western travellers visiting Turkey in the 19th century: a phallographic and obscene Karagöz, exhibiting his body and phallus shamelessly, in full view.

Below is the testimony of Pietro della Valle (1586-1652), who in 1614 moved to and stayed in Istanbul for more than a year³⁶:

Behind a sheet of lit-up canvas or paper they show

³⁴ Recall, for instance, that *Karagöz* plays in Algeria expressed the people's feelings against French occupation, until 1843, when the French prohibited performances. In spite of the ban, *Karagöz* survived until 1914. Paradoxically, on the other hand, in Greece '*Karaghiozis*' spread particularly in 1821, during the war of liberation from Ottoman domination, and it was performed in a nationalistic and anti-Turkish key.

³⁵ FLÖGEL KARL F. - BAUER MAX, *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*, G. Müller, München, 1914, pp. 3, 5 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

³⁶ DELLA VALLE PIETRO, *Viaggi*, Ed. di Brighton, 1951, quoted by ROSSI ETTORE, *Karagöz in Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, p. 882 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

diverse representations of shadows and puppet figures, which move, walk and perform a thousand acts, similar to those which we still exhibit in certain [theatrical] structures. Such puppet shadows are however not shown mute, like ours, but are made to speak in a similar fashion to those in Naples, outside the Castello, and in Piazza Navona, by *bagatellieri*, i.e. the player in there speaks for them with different voices in various languages and performs various gallant jokes very well, but all representations depict obscene things...

And here is what the French writer, Pierre Loti (1850-1923)³⁷, has to say about *Karagöz*, with reference to a play he had watched in Istanbul:

He finds intonations and postures which Guignol would never have imagined, the caresses which he lavished upon madam Karagöz are irresistibly comical. Karagöz arrives even at questioning the spectators and discussing with the public. He exhibits himself in totally incongruous jests and dares to do, in front of everyone, things which would scandalize a capuchin monk. This can happen in Turkey. Censorship finds no objection and every evening one can see well educated Turks with lantern in hand leading groups of children to Karagöz. In those halls full of children they give shows which, in England, would make a guard-house roar.

In 1853, following his journey to Turkey, Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) published *Constantinople*. An entire chapter of this book is dedicated to Karagöz, the physiognomy of whom the author describes as «a *mélange* of stupidity (*bêtise*), lust, and wit, for he is

³⁷ BORTAD DENIS - BOUCROT FRANCIS, *Les Théâtres d'ombres - histoire et techniques*, L'Archives, Paris, 1956, p. 33 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

at one and the same time Prud'homme [Louis Maire], Priapus and Robert Macaire»³⁸.

And he further describes the reactions of children who watch with enthusiasm and wonder the performance of Karagöz, in spite of its obscenities:

Bewitched, abducted, their beautiful eyes like black flowers, open wide, they watched Karagöz as he devoted himself to his impure Saturnalia, enjoying all of his monstrous whims. From these innocently corrupted angels, each erotic feat stole bouts of pealing laughter and an endless clapping of hands (...) for these mad Atellan farces, in which the lustful scenes of Aristophanes combined with the burlesque dreams of Rabelais.³⁹

Gautier in fact refers to two kinds of plays: one “decorous”, the other “licentious”. He also writes about an uncensored version of *Karagöz* and complains about the censorship of the play's obscene and erotic aspects. In time, according to Gautier, Karagöz was submitted to “a veritable castration”, becoming a “Pulcinella without his stick, a satire without horns”, thus losing much of his originality.

In *Viaggio in Oriente*⁴⁰ (1851), Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) collects stories and impressions of his journey between Cairo, Beirut and Constantinople in 1842. In this book he describes a *Karagöz* play, which was less licentious but always with sexual undertones, reconstructing the dialogues even⁴¹. The subject of the plot, *Karagöz*

³⁸ GAUTIER THEOPHILE, *Constantinople*, Michel Lévy Frères Libraires-Editeurs, Paris, 1856, quote from p.173. For the chapter on *Karagöz* see pp.168-180.

³⁹ GAUTIER THEOPHILE, *ivi*, p. 179.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of this work see SAID EDWARD W., *Orientalismo - L'immagine europea dell'Oriente*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2001.

⁴¹ Quoted in BORDAT DENIS - BOUCROT FRANCIS, *Les Théâtres d'ombres - histoire et techniques*, L'Arches, Paris, 1956, pp. 38-44, and in part also in POUGIN ARTHUR, *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtres et des arts qui s'y rattachent*,

victim of his chastity, was very common: the protagonist, struggling against his own nature, fights off the lust of women and in the name of friendship resists the romantic advances of his friend's wife, whom it was his duty to guard and preserve her chastity. Below is an extract of the dialogue with his friend, as reported by the French write:

- Well my friend, tonight I had an idea: to put you in guard of her virtue, I know your delicacy and the deep affection you have for me, I am happy to offer you such demonstration of trust
- Wretched man! Says Karagöz- your proposal is pure madness! Just take a look at me!
- What is the matter?
- What? Don't you understand that as soon as your wife will see me she will not be able to resist being possessed by me?

In a text dating 1854⁴², Charles Rolland reviews a *Karagöz* play which he had watched and which started thus:

Entering the stage, Karagöz sings the joys of love, but of an exclusively material love, and with details which would scandalise the most tolerant. Then, when he finishes his verses, several women taking a walk little by little enter the stage: the harem of a pasha, a merchant's wife, that of an Armenian *saraf*, that of a worker. At their sight the lustful [Karagöz] is enflamed, his brutal appetite manifests itself with an indecent show which arouses the whole auditorium, including the children.

Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C. ie, Paris, 1885, pp. 462-463.

⁴² Quoted in BORDAT DENIS - BOUCROT FRANCIS, *Ibidem*, 35-37 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

The Italian writer Edmondo De Amicis (1846-1908), in his travel reportage, *Costantinopoli*⁴³ (published in 1877), speaks with indignation of Karagöz, a figure which in his eyes condensed all the lustfulness of Turkish men. De Amicis hurls such scathing moral judgments of a despicable racist bend at Karagöz, that in this text the reader could barely recognise that same good hearted author of the book *Cuore*:

The same Turk who turns red to the roots when asked how his spouse is doing, sends his little boys and girls to listen to the foul obscenities of Karagöz, who corrupts their imagination even before they come of age; he too often forgets the harem's sweetness for the vile voluptuousness exemplified for the first time by the famous Baiazet the lightning, and in all probability not last in line, Mahmut the reformer. And in the absence of other evidence, that Karagöz would suffice as proof of the deep corruption which hides under the veil of Muslim severity.

He is a grotesque figurine representing the caricature of the middle-class Turk, a kind of Chinese shadow, which moves hands, legs and head behind a transparent screen, and is nearly always the protagonist of certain oddly comic plays, the subject matter of which is in the majority of times a love affair. He is a deprived equivalent of Pulcinella: foolish, cunning and cynical, lustful like a satire, big mouthed like a whore, and makes the auditorium laugh, or rather, roar with enthusiasm at all kinds of tricks, discords and extravagant gesticulations, which normally are or hide obscenities. And the nature of these obscenities can be easily imagined when considering that if Karagöz resembles Pulcinella in spirit, his body resembles that of Priapus; a resemblance of which, before censorship restrained his boundless freedom, he gave

⁴³ DE AMICIS EDMONDO, *Costantinopoli*, Einaudi, Torino, 2007, p. 70.

detailed, visible proof to the audience, and often the whole play revolved around this noble pivot.

Also the French writer Guy De Maupassant (1850-1893), recording his thoughts⁴⁴ as he walked through the streets of Algiers, picks Karagöz as a model of obscenity and expression of the corruption of local customs.

Let us not forget that, not many years ago, representations of Caragousse, forbidden nowadays, were shown in these very streets – a kind of monstrous and obscene Guignol, the incredible, ignoble and unspeakable exploits of which children, ignorant and corrupt, admired with their big black eyes, laughing and applauding.

Sabri Esat Siyavusgil⁴⁵, one of the major Turkish scholars of *Karagöz*, underlines that occidental travellers, not knowing a word of Turkish and relying upon «Levantine guides who hated all things Turkish», very often expatiate upon the obscenity of Karagöz, or «exchange his exaggeratedly long arm for an indecent object». He further observes that often these same travelers see shadow puppet plays not in decent places, were representations conform to tradition, but in ill-famed taverns, were all kinds of more or less indecent improvisations are held.

While furnishing these “interpretations” of *Karagöz* by occidental travellers-writers, we would like to definitely ward off the risk of that tautological thought Edward Said cautions against, i.e. the idea that «if the Orient were able to furnish a representation of itself, it

⁴⁴ DE MAUPASSANT GUY, *Vie Errante*, Paul Ollendorf Editeur, Paris, 1890, p. 135.

⁴⁵ Quoted in BORDAT DENIS - BOUCROT FRANCIS, Op. cit., pp. 35-37 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

would have done so by itself». Indeed, on the one hand, travel logs and the accounts provided by occidental travellers, qua “external observers”, furnish interesting and possibly less filtered elements for evaluation with regards to *Karagöz* (we have to acknowledge, moreover, that such documents constitute a far more accessible and consultable repertory when compared to Turkish texts). On the other hand, in the vast majority of cases one remains bewildered in front of such presumptuous exegesis of the world, mostly sparse with moral judgments, on the part of these writers – truly surprising when such judgments come from “civilisations” which define themselves progressive and evolved. Judgments which invariably tend to reassert a cultural and moral superiority with regards to expressive forms which are considered “primitive”, naive, indecent, and to the “customs” reflected in such forms.

From what could be verified so far in the course of the present research, a few rare images remain of this obscene *Karagöz* flaunting a long phallus⁴⁶.

There is, moreover, the strange figure of *Tarman*, one of the main characters of Arab *Karakuz* – a Turkish master of *Karagöz* mentioned him in connection with *Karagöz* plays for an “adult” audience. The figure of *Tarman* would at times exhibit an erect phallus and it would, therefore, also represent a Priapesque figure, just like the obscene *Karagöz*. For the moment, however, the scarce amount of evidence prevents further examination of this comparison⁴⁷.

The subject of *Karagöz*'s obscenity is indeed very important, i.e. unless it is merely considered from the typically European perspective

⁴⁶ From the already quoted FLÖGEL KARL F. - BAUER MAX, *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*, G. Müller, München, 1914, pp. 3 and 5 (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento). Metin And provides the same images in *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, pp.110-111, and notes that one of two is preserved in the Vienna Museum.

⁴⁷ SAVARESE NICOLA, *Il Teatro al di là del mare - Leggendaro occidentale dei teatri d'Oriente*, Studio Forma, Lodi, 1980, p. 113, reproduced an unidentified figure with an erect phallus.

of a taste for *oriental sensuality* (essentially linked to an eroticism/exoticism to be discovered at all costs), or from the perspective of a bourgeois and censorious morality which, in cultural and social processes across the globe, effects considerable subtractions at the level of body, of aspects connected with its “obscenity” and desire.

It is not within the scope of the present paper to delve deeper into the strong connection which exists between comedy, body and *Komos*, as this discourse would in itself call for a new chapter of complex studies⁴⁸. In this regard Metin And underlines the relationships which exist between popular Turkish theatre, including its comic forms⁴⁹, and Anatolian fertility rites, the celebrations related to the figures of Dionysus, Attis, Osiris or to Eleusinian mysteries, also the links with carnival rituals, such as the *Porsug*, transformed through the theatrical and expressive forms of Anatolia⁵⁰.

The Turkish scholar underlines that these dramatic-ritualistic or realistic-comic forms, which were still common among the farming populations of Anatolia until the 1970s, have not acquired dramatic-literary formalisation, due primarily to the influence of the Byzantine Church and of Islam, which have prevented the dramatic

⁴⁸ For a detailed study on the topic of *Komos* and comedy refer to TESSARI ROBERTO, *Baubo - frammenti di un mito di fondazione dello spettacolo comico* (available online).

⁴⁹ See AND METIN, *On the dramatic fertility rituals of Anatolian Turkey*, in «Asian Folklore Studies» *Folklore Studies*, 1978 and, by the same author, *Drama at the crossroads - Turkish performing arts. Link past and present, East and West*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1991.

⁵⁰ Of particular important practice (also because it recalls the chthonic statuettes of female figures - a trunk on which the face merges with the sex - linked to Baubo, the central figure of the myth possibly at the foundations of comedy) is the *Kasnak*, popular among the farmers of Anatolia, in which men hide head and arms under a cover in the form of a turban and on their bare bellies bear the drawing of a big face, with fake arms attached to the pelvis, making them appear like dwarfs with big faces. These faces are made to smile or cry, depending on the movements of the pelvis.

development of the rich and vital traditions of Anatolian folklore⁵¹.

But the porosity of pre-dramatic and dramatic ritual forms is such that it calls for an urgent course of research, certainly a labyrinthine, non-linear process, especially if one were to venture into the vast cultural and geographic mosaic linked to the pre-Islamic and Islamic Turkish world (granted that we wish to use Islam as a grand historical divide)⁵².

In *Drama at the crossroads* (1991), Metin And develops a complex study aiming at: defining the basic schemas of rituals and pre-dramatic forms pertaining to the ancient cultures of the Near East; distinguishing the forms of the first rituals and the pre-dramatic forms of Altaic and Islamic countries; and finally establishing the links between these two aspects of his research.

Upon reflection, from the regions of the Eastern Mediterranean and those of Central Asia emerges an incredibly rich panorama of cultural passages (the Turkish populations of Central Asia were essentially nomadic), of exchanges, of transformations, intertwining cultural plots which are at times inextricably connected.

We thus come back to Karagöz and to his obscenity, relating to the phallogoric rites that are diffused in all the Mediterranean and Anatolian area. An aspect which links the figure of Karagöz to the figures of jesters and mimes, central figures in the Turkish theatre world.

It must be pointed out that, before the penetration of Islam in the sixth century, this area saw the influx of theatrical influences from India. Various historical sources witness the passage of gypsies, dancers and musicians across the Iranian plateau, verifying that

⁵¹ Metin And distinguishes between folkloric and popular categories, particularly, in the context of theatre. See also AND METIN, *The Turkish Folk Theatre*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», n. 38, 1979, pp. 155-176, where he analyses *Köse Play* and *Orta Oyounu*, identifying them as folkloric theatre and popular theatre respectively.

⁵² For a history of the Turkish world between the 7th and 16th century see BERNARDINI MICHELE, *Il mondo iranico e turco dall'avvento dell'Islam all'affermazione dei safavidi*, Einaudi, Torino, 2003.

Indian theatrical traditions were known to the Sassanid empire (225-652). In the epic poem *Shahmanah* (Book of kings), the Iranian poet Firdusi (10th century) narrates that during his reign the legendary Sassanid king Barham Gor ordered an authentic importation of thousands of musicians, dancers and actors from India. The famous Sassanid king, Cosroe II (591-628), a great patron of the arts, kept actors and musicians of Indian origin in his retinue.

Many gypsies at Byzantium, especially those hailing from the Indian Rajasthan, were devoted to the performing arts: jesters, mimes, storytellers, dancers and musicians.

The Turkish shadow theatre, *Karagöz*, represents various characteristics – movements, postures, costumes – transposed from Ottoman puppet theatre (*kukla*) and other elements which are evidently transposed from the arts of jesters, buffoons and grotesque dancers portrayed in many miniature Ottoman illustrations of the 16th, 17th and 18th century. These images of jesters recall the figure of Karagöz, not only through their hats and costumes, but also through their postures and gestures.

But above all Karagöz displays the uninhibited and popular spirit proper to jesters, often reverting to obscenities in both speech and behaviour, to a licentiousness which marks and authorises a suspension and inversion of the ordinary codes of behaviour.

During the expansion of the Roman Empire, the appreciation of the mastery of mimes was such as to be recorded in testimonies of a constant flux of jesters, but also of acrobats and jugglers, into Rome, above all from Syria and Central Asia.

Although records of performances during the Byzantine period are scarce, mime was certainly one of the most valued performances at the court of Byzantium and during the sumptuous imperial feasts held at the capital's Hippodrome⁵³.

⁵³ For further studies on performances at Byzantium and on Turkish farce see

Before becoming empress, Theodora, wife of Justinian, was a dancer and a mime.

Even after the Christianisation of performance, mime survived in Byzantium.

A very well known, albeit indirect, testimony of the comic talent of Selguicide actors is furnished by the Byzantine princess Anna Comnena (1083-1153) in a work entitled *Alessiade*, in which she speaks about the farces staged at Konia by enemies of her father, the emperor Alessio I Comneno, who was at war with the Turks. The emperor himself was the protagonist of these farces, ridiculed for his aching feet:

They have represented doctors and other people busying about the emperor and they have put the emperor himself, lying on a bed, and they have made a performance of him. These puerile jokes caused much hilarity among the barbarians.

Mime and farce played a very important role in performance culture also during the Ottoman empire. The court of the Sultans distinguished itself for the spectacular feasts at which mimes, buffoons, jugglers, acrobats, conjurors, poets, dancers and musicians took part.

Manuele Paleologo narrates that when he arrived at the court of the Turkish Sultan Bajazet, towards the end of the 15th century, he found an incredible number of mimes there.

Before the appearance of *Orta Oyunu*, moreover, several testimonies speak of improvised farces, such as *Kol Oyunu* (company performance), *Meydan Oyunu* (square or public square performance) and *Taklit Oyunu* (burlesque performance), which were based on basic characters and dramatic plots, on parodies of dialectal features

NIESSEN CARL, *Handbuch der Theater Wissenschaft*, 1958, and SAVARESE NICOLA, *Teatro e spettacolo fra Oriente e Occidente*, Laterza, Bari, 1992. (Both included in the Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

and fixed character types, on tricks, salacious jokes and slapstick comedy, accompanied by music and based on imitations (*taklit*, a fundamental principle of dramatic-farcesque interpretations), often imitations of animals (primarily the deer, but also the camel and various other animals). Not to forget the substrate connected with Uralo-Altaiic popular rites which constitutes an important *humus* for theatre, dance and music. Village feasts constituted a fundamental aspect of social life linked to seasonal rites⁵⁴.

The relationships between the different kinds of performances are reciprocal and fertile, with a constant exchange of contents and techniques passing between puppet theatre, shadow theatre and real actors. «Each category of artists: puppeteers, conjurors, storytellers, acrobatic actors, mimes, musicians and dancers bring their contributions and starting from their particular performances proceed to form interactions. It is for this reason that there are several points in common between them and similarities between *Karagöz* and *Orta Oyunu*»⁵⁵.

Moreover, Altan Gokalp⁵⁶ underlines another apparently paradoxical element of transgression regarding the customary calendar of *Karagöz* performances, which became more intense in conjunction with great religious festivals: Ramadan, the month of

⁵⁴ For a synthetic but precise overview, including a perspective onto the extraordinary variety of circus and acrobatic performances see AND METIN, *Turchia*, in Enciclopedia dello spettacolo, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, pp. 1167-1179 (Fondo d'Amico-Università del Salento). For an in-depth examination see also AND METIN, *On the dramatic fertility rituals of Anatolian Turkey*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», 1978 and, by the same author, *The Turkish Folk Theatre*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», n.38, 1979, pp. 155-176.

⁵⁵ AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, p. 48.

⁵⁶ GOKALP ALTAN, *Les indigènes de la capitale et le kaléidoscope culturel ottoman: les figures "ethniques" sur la scène du Karagöz turc*, in AA-AA.VV., *Théâtres d'ombres-tradition et modernité*, Institut International de la Marionette, Edition L'Harmattan, Paris, 1986.

fasting, and circumcision. Customs which inevitably recall elements belonging to the context of carnival, such as abstention and outburst, the reversal of social values, derision and organised transgression.

According to the German scholar Carl Niessen⁵⁷, the role played by the gypsies in the field of the performing arts and of farce, contributing to their dissemination, is considerable. The writer and traveller Evlija Çelebi often refers to gypsies as forming part, in the 17th century, of the actors' guild. Moreover, the ancient term *kol*, which denoted a company of farce actors, also referred to gypsy musicians.

An important contribution also derived from Armenian, Greek and Hebrew artists. Regarding the latter, it is worth noting that over 20,000 Jews entered the Ottoman empire, where they found refuge after being expelled from Spain, Portugal and other European countries between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. The Ottoman empire had conquered Istanbul in 1453, electing it the new capital city, was in its period of maximum expansion. The majority of the Jews were medics, buffoons and jesters. In Turkey they distinguished themselves for their abilities as puppeteers and as conjurors. Considered by some scholars as a possible *trait-d'union* between *Commedia dell'Arte* and Turkish comic theatre (besides the Italian community located in Istanbul since the Middle Ages, a community which played a considerable role in the dissemination of *Commedia dell'Arte*), the Jews may have already encountered shadow theatre in Spain, where witnesses testify to the presence of the so-called *ombres chinoises*.

In this picture it might be interesting to compare the figure of Karagöz with that of the Zanni, a central *Commedia dell'Arte* figure.

Zanni (not to forget that there is also a “courteous” Zanni and his alter ego, an “obscene” Zanni) is the schemer, the *Briccone Divino*, the *Trickster*. An extremely important, capricious, puerile, obscene

⁵⁷ NIESEN CARL, *Handbuch der Theater Wissenschaft*, Verlag Lechte, Emsdetten, 1958, pp.1240-1252.

figure, the Zanni is clearly connected to the buffoon, to carnival rites, and is related to the figures of Pulcinella and Harlequin which manifest chthonic and infernal traits, also through their masks and costumes.

If the scandalous elements of *Commedia dell'Arte* resided in its clownish appearance, in the obscenity propitiated by the *Trickster*, in the exhibition of the female figure, in the derision of the *Vecchi*, in its erotic-sentimental vein, these same elements would be eventually be subjected to a domesticating force, weakening the potential of chaos, in favour of an “urban ridicule”, «no longer the epiphany of the Obscene, but which perpetuates an *allusion* to the obscene, no longer the potential of carnival Comedy, but an “urbanised” hilarity, laughing at all costs»⁵⁸.

A destiny which appears to unite these two forms of comedy and their protagonists, Karagöz and Zanni.

A kaleidoscope of identities

Apart from the duo Hacivat - Karagöz, in Turkish shadow theatre there are about sixty characters, many of which form a kind of kaleidoscope of cultures, representing the plurality of the diverse cultural, social, religious, linguistic identities which made up the vast Ottoman empire, an empire which extended across three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe – with Istanbul as its centre since 1453.

Many *Karagöz* characters reemerge in puppet theatre (*kukla*), in which the protagonists always form a comic duo, İhtiyar and İbis, and in *Orta Oyunu*, again with the duo Pişekar and Kawuklu. After all this is a “transcultural” element which also features with the “regional” types of *Commedia dell'Arte*, with which we are more familiar.

⁵⁸ TESSARI ROBERTO, *Commedia dell'Arte: la Maschera e l'Ombra* (1981), Mursia, Milano, 2009

In this incredible display of characters we can find representatives of all social classes, starting from Bekri Mustafa (the farmer who, enriched, goes to the city, starts frequenting dives, gets drunk and inevitably ends up being swindled) to the dervish, the romantic robber, to the Zenne (women of loose morals) flanked by many other female figures from different walks of life (among whom the daughter and wife of Hacivat and Karagöz), in addition to male and female dancers, beggars, the dwarf (Bebe Ruhi), the opium addict (Tiryaki), the lover or the rich and many-sided libertine (Çelebi)⁵⁹, Tussuz Deli the bully, the wizard, the witch, the priest, the conjuror, the servant, the himhim (a person who speaks through his nose) and many more besides.

We see, moreover, a parade of diverse “ethnic” figures: the Arab, the Greek (Rumi), the Jew (Kawassan), the Albanian (Arnavut), the Turk from Anatolia, the Armenian, the Lâz from the Black Sea, the Kurd, the Persian, the European (Frenk). Each with his own dialect, which becomes a source of comicity, of double entendre, of hilarious misunderstandings. None are spared the fierce game of irony. Each strange accent and each linguistic mistake become occasions for laughter, but also pretending not to know Turkish can favour a purposefully improper use of the language.

According to the Turkish scholar Altan Gokalp⁶⁰, these characters do not have a direct relationship with their communities of origin. Plays are generally set in a district of the capital, with each district representing the respective «communities, homogenous at the

⁵⁹ Of particular interest is the double image of the Çelebi, wearing an 18th century costume and a more modern costume, furnished in the Enciclopedia dello spettacolo, Le Maschere, Roma, 1954-1968, pp. 881-882 (Fondo D’Amico-Università del Salento).

⁶⁰ GOKALP ALTAN, *Les indigènes de la capitale et le kaléidoscope culturel ottoman: les figures “ethniques” sur la scène du Karagöz turc*, in AA.VV., *Théâtres d’ombres-tradition et modernité*, Institut International de la Marionette, Edition L’Harmattan, Paris, 1986.

ethical and religious level, of 19th century Constantinople. Figures of a socio-cultural landscape which is external to the social reality of the neighborhood, constructed upon sources pertaining to a dominant ideology and in function of the place which a particular ethno-cultural group occupies in the collective representations of the time»⁶¹.

According to Gokalp, the ethnic figures of *Karagöz* function only through their evocative power, and by means of puns, related mainly to the “foreign” language, practically eliminating social reality from the representations, in a way similar to the portrayal of Poland and the Polish in Ubu. It is in the context of spatial (neighbourhood) and socio-cultural dynamics (corporative and class differences) that one must consider the characters as “imitative” (*taklit*) of “ethnic types”, «not qua a fixed repertory of stereotypes which the society of Istanbul holds about the minorities of the Empire»⁶².

In this regard, it is interesting to note how the portrayal of these characters has changed over time – in their costumes (from iconographic records one can note significant differences), in their language and in the relationships between characters.

Although shadow theatre is characterised by a high degree of codification and stylization, one would be committing a grave mistake in thinking that its forms are perpetrated unchanged over time. We have seen, for instance, how one of the central aspects of *Karagöz*, his obscene acts, has undergone a strong process of purification with the passing of time.

Surely, a diachronic analysis of the characters (and of the settings) of *Karagöz* could furnish very interesting indications with respects

⁶¹ GOKALP ALTAN, Op. cit., p.187.

⁶² GOKALP ALTAN, Op. cit., p. 190. In this regard, see also the analysis provided by S. E. Siyavuşgil, who speaks of *Karagöz* as a theatrical extension of the social reality in the districts (*mahalla*) of Istanbul, addressing primarily social and family realities.

to the mutations of Turkish society, which has always been and still is deeply multicultural and which has seen the often peaceful, other times conflictual, coexistence of diverse, but also strongly interwoven and “hybrid” cultures.

The presence of great part of the ethnic character types is recorded from the very first essays written on *Karagöz*, in the 16th and 17th centuries, studies which form the basis of the tradition.

The figure of the Frenk, which represents a new social class in the Ottoman capital, appears later and it is incorrectly identified with the Levantines. This new social class is composed of a composite population which includes Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Italians, but also Arabs and Turks coming from the remote borders of the Empire. The common denominator of this community is that of having chosen the citizenship of one of the European powers, albeit residing in the Ottoman capital. This “choice of society” is concretised in a whole series of social, economic and legal privileges, and in the adoption of European cultural models. A community which lives in the quarters of European fashion in Istanbul. «The cafes and workshops are Greek, the dress fashion is French, the *brasserie* is German, music is Italian or Spanish, only the porter and the warden are Turkish or Kurdish», such is the ironic tone applied by the Turkish historian Dogan Avcioğlu, in depicting of the capital of the Levantines⁶³.

This new Levantine society reflects the customs of the court, evermore influenced by European models. The Frenk is nicknamed “fresh-water French” and is ridiculed for his bent to imitate occidentals at all costs, as well as for his disregard of anything Turkish. He speaks an incomprehensible language, mixing Italian and Greek, a sign of his pertaining to the “westernised” community in the capital, and is mocked by the appellative of *Mösyö Karolin* (Monsieur Caroline).

⁶³ For a basic study of this repertory see AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977.

The figure of the Frenk allows for a targeted and precise social criticism. Not that Karagöz does not criticise Turkish society even in a ferocious manner, especially targeting morality and hypocrisy, but his attacks often appear as the *exploit* of “the king’s fool”.

The figure of the Frenk instead allows for a more systematic criticism. A new element is added to the mosaic of communities composed of figures hailing from diverse geographical origins and trade corporations, an element which functions as a divide in the taxonomy of “ethnic” figures. The appearance of a reformist bureaucracy in the mid 19th century, a class formed by westerners, marks a break with traditional society. In *Karagöz* this important passage is assimilated through the introduction of a new power code, a language «which is ridiculed and mystified by Karagöz who uses it in the exchanges with the characters which use and abuse such language»⁶⁴.

In relation to these time-sensitive transformations one might wish to consider the following, symptomatic fact: around 1840 the repertory of Turkish shadow theatre is enriched by plots drawn from foreign works (a period in which the influence of western theatre starts being strongly felt in Turkey, with very important consequences and to the detriment of traditional theatrical forms). These plots are adapted to the characteristics of *Karagöz* figures and to the Turkish context, thus paving the way, as already pointed out, to the introduction of new characters.

The French scholar Adolphe Thalasso, in a special edition of *La Revue théâtrale* (1904), furnishes some extracts from *Karagöz* plays to which he had attended and which were based on various *pièces* by Molière, particularly *The Miser*, *Scapin’s Schemings* and *Tartuffe*⁶⁵.

It is interesting to note how the various ethnic groups are characterised by their professions. Their pertaining to a category of trade confers them with social depth and defines their belonging to a community.

⁶⁴ GOKALP ALTAN, Op. cit., p. 195.

⁶⁵ GOKALP ALTAN, Op. cit., p.189.

The aspect of linguistic diversity, which generates gags, misunderstandings, puns and not exactly veiled allusions via the *lapsus*, represents a very important element in *Karagöz*, in the way it inverts the order of discourse, unmasking ambiguity and falsity.

Every autochthonous character «from each neighbourhood has its own version of the Turkish language, in its particular choice of words, in inflection and diction. And this may constitute an important moment of dramatic tension between the characters»⁶⁶. It may happen, for instance, that two characters start a conversation to realise, but only at a latter stage, that they are not understanding each other at all, due to the “grammatical fantasies” of the respective dialects.

Characters with a major comic effect are, precisely, the *taklit*, caricatures of provincial figures, of people from the colonies, of foreigners, of the professions.

Every *Karagöz* play ends with this ritual formula: «Yet again our tongue has stumbled, please forgive us».

Such linguistic diversion, however, is not merely due to the jolts of a linguistic alterity, manifested at the level of difficult or impossible communication, but it is proper to *Karagöz*, the protagonist, who speaks a popular language, who dismantles words and their meaning, thus corroding the logic of language.

Besides, a verbal mechanism which is fundamental in *Karagöz* is the *tekerleme*, a mechanism in which non-sense explodes through the deformation of words, via free word associations, words which are disintegrated into pure sounds, surreal narrations, oniric language, hyperboles, cacophony, metaphor, anaphor, antithesis, vulgar and obscene allusions, repetitions... What is unleashed in the *tekerleme* is a magical-evocative value of the word, of sound, in repetition, an alter, secret value.

Popular hero, in his bad manners and bad language, *Karagöz*

⁶⁶ A number of extracts are produced in BORDAT DENIS-BOUCROT FRANCIS, *Les Théâtres d'ombres-histoire et techniques*, L'Arches, Paris, 1956, pp. 45-50. (Fondo D'Amico-Università del Salento).

contrasts with the highly educated Hacivat, who speaks an scholarly language, frequently citing erudite Arab and Persian sources, and desperately seeking to correct the gross mistakes of his companion. Hacivat, with all his learning, is bound to the moral principles of a privileged class and has no intention of altering his *status quo*, whereas Karagöz, always astray and without work, does not behave according to social norms and therefore «affords a freedom of expression, he challenges injustice, the sword and the rope»⁶⁷.

Comedy plays with words and twists their meaning. One must always keep in mind the comic mechanism which gives rise to complex relationships, cruel even (contrary to Hacivat, Karagöz is not respected in the neighbourhood), but which allows laughter to unmask social pretensions and which, nevertheless, does not exclude diversity, but mingles all in a vortex of identities. And all characters, without exception, have to pass through the workings of comedy, of the ridiculous. For this reason I would keep a certain reserve in relation to the second aspect of Altan Gokalp's affirmation that «each time Karagöz is the civilizing hero in a saga of derision: those who voice the language of power, just like those citizens of alterity, are at the same time enemies which need to be undermined via the word»⁶⁸.

Let us, however, take a closer look at these characters. Each one is strongly typified, in apparel but also in custom⁶⁹.

Türc or Baba Himmet, is a lumberjack from Anatolia, hailing from the inland forests of the Black Sea. He is a big man (so big that Karagöz sometimes climbs up a ladder in order to communicate with him), the biggest figure of *Karagöz* (on average figures vary between 24 and 35 cm in height, whereas Baba Himmet exceeds 57 cm.). Coming to the city from his remote village, Baba Himmet is a

⁶⁷ AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, p.83.

⁶⁸ AND METIN, *ivi*, p.86.

⁶⁹ GOKALP ALTAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

man of scarce wit and with his naivety he often falls into the traps of Karagöz. Together with the merchant from Cesarea (a more witty and business minded figure), just like other characters from Anatolia, Baba Himmət is also characterised by his adherence to Islam, as well as by his stark provincialism manifested especially in the “diversity” of his language, which is marked by a heavy accent and a “defective” pronunciation.

Lâz, hailing from the Black Sea, precisely from the Ponto, is a sailor, a wool carder or tinsmith. He is a big gossip, with a strong Black Sea accent, and rambles on with a fast speech, without listening to what others have to say.

Rumelili or Muhacı, an immigrant from the Balkans, is a wrestler who boasts of his supposed victories. He sometimes works as a driver. He speaks a Turkish of the Balkans, full of words and expressions which are incomprehensible for a Turk of the capitol.

The Kurdish is the neighbourhood night guard, or a porter, and he often speaks Kurdish. He has a void look, but tries to appear more intelligent than he really is, although in the end he fails to keep up with events. Like Lâz, Türç and Rumelili, which are also joined by the Gipsy (*Çingene*), are recognised as inland immigrants. According to Altan Gokalp⁷⁰, Gipsy serves as a sidekick enabling Karagöz to hold a whole speech in a jargon of obscene content, because in Istanbul the jargon used in sex or money talk is essentially based on gypsy sayings.

A character who distinguishes himself for his ignorance and bad temper is the Albanian (*Arnavut*). His accent, which he tries to hide using educated language, is the motive of comic situations. A drink vendor, gardener, gamekeeper or a merchant of livestock, he is always singing a song about vegetables.

Coming from the borders of the Empire we have the characters of the Arab and the Persian (*Acem*).

⁷⁰ For a detailed description of Karagöz characters see AND METIN, *Théâtre d'ombres turc*, Editions Dost, Ankara, 1977, pp. 83-94, and GOKALP ALTAN, Op. cit., pp.190-196.

Arab is an appellative applied to two kinds of characters. The first is the “white Arab”, who speaks both Egyptian and the dialect of Damascus, although he merely splutters out questions, which he repeats mechanically: Who? To Whom? When? Where? What about?

He is a particularly stupid character, by trade a coffee merchant or vendor, sometimes a simple traveller. His Turkish is ridden with mistakes in pronunciation. Greedy, obsequious and false. His speech is broken with an overflowing river of prayers which he addresses to his benefactor, although his are actually curses disguised as prayers.

The “black Arab”, native of Ethiopia, is by extension the “Negro”, a eunuch, legendary for his stupidity.

The Persian is a fabric or carpet merchant, or else a loan shark. He is ridiculed for his emphatic and pompous character, which he boasts in spite of his low social status. He often appears riding a horse, declaiming words in Persian. Lacking any sense of humour, he does not appreciate the jokes of Karagöz, whereas Hacivat flatters him calling him “the rose of Iran”.

The great part of the characters mentioned so far, beyond their diverse geographic, linguistic and professional characteristics, all belong to the Empire’s Muslim community. Whereas there are non-Muslim characters which are integral to the social fabric of the neighbourhood. Little relevance is given to their legal *status quo* of *zimmi/dimmi* (non-Muslims) in the repertory of Karagöz plays, exception made for the figure of the Frenk.

These include the characters of the Armenian, the Jew and the Greek, a character which according to Metin And overlaps that of the Frenk.

The Armenian (*Ayyaz*) has two different social roles. He is a lay man, carrying out menial jobs such as heating public baths, but can also be an irrigation specialist, or a butler in a rich palace; also a jewel seller and sommelier. He is depicted as a busy laborer, especially in the first case, but lacking any special sense of humor.

He sometimes appears particularly interested in music and poetry and gives emphatic speeches on art and civilisation.

The Jew (Cut, Yahudi or Çifit) is a very particular character. He is portrayed as a merchant, second-hand dealer or usurer. His figure physically resembles a little that of Karagöz. He is evil, trivial, false and greedy, and playing on his grammatically incorrect Turkish (a mixture of Spanish and Turkish) he revels in obscene word games against Karagöz. For instance, he would ask Karagöz: “You live here?”, but in his purposefully mangled pronunciation the question becomes: “You fart here?”.

Then there are the women, the many female characters, the Zenne, which animate *Karagöz*: women of every age, social status, skin colour and religious belief. Their voice is a male falsetto. Wives, daughters, dancers, courtesans (at times represented in full décolleté), they are often the motive of action, the motive behind these dances of identities and genres.

(Traduzione dall'italiano di Victor Jacono)

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Stars and acrobats

Fabio Tolledi

For many years, *performativity* has represented an effective key of interpretation in identifying the processes which mediate the construction of sense on the part of a given society.

From the research that we are conducting it is evident that, in the social environment of Turkey and of the South-East Mediterranean, we are witnessing a continuous process of profound upheaval e reformulation of the concrete and symbolic spaces pertaining to a manifold and varied context.

The forms of *popular* theatre, the forms through which Turkish society entertains and narrates itself (attributing traits which are absolutely proper and peculiar to it), are constantly transformed, subjected to all kinds of influences and drives. From belly dance to shadow theatre, from occidental drama to several forms of storytelling, it is possible to identify a continuous mode of self-representation and of representing the conflict which affords the social dynamics of Turkish society.

Watching Karagöz permits the observation of that subtle, constantly shifting, texture of ways by means of which a society represents itself, by means of which a society is able to describe its concrete and material horizon.

In this sense, the contribution of Victor Turner is vital for an understanding of the concept of *performativity*.

It is necessary to remember that the concept of *performance* indicates, first of all, the practice of bodies, a practice apt at producing a critical redefinition of the surrounding reality. The theoretical reflection of Victor Turner is, in this sense, crucial precisely because the concept of *performance* is used in order to penetrate liminal phenomenologies (potentially fertile zones for the rewriting of cultural codes), therefore to also penetrate social transformation itself.

The point of departure in Turner's analysis resides in the concept of *social drama*.

According to Turner, in fact,

a social drama is primarily manifested as the rupture of a norm, as the breaking of a moral rule, of the law, of custom or of the etiquette in some public circumstance. Or it can emerge from the background of passionate feelings. Once it appears, it is difficult to erase it. In any case, it produces a growing crisis, a fracture or an important turn in the relationships between the members of a social field, in which the apparent peace is changed into open conflict and latent antagonisms become visible. Parties are joined, factions are formed, and unless the conflict may be rapidly confined in a limited zone of social interaction, the rupture has the tendency to expand and spread to the point of coinciding with some fundamental division in the vast complexity of relevant social relationships, which the factions in conflict belong to.

Social drama, therefore, takes place when, in the quotidian sphere of a particular context, a fracture is created in the traditional norms of life, or when, in a complex society, a turning point is generated

in the consolidated socio-cultural structure and, at the same time, strategies defining contrasting actions are brought into effect. *Social dramas* reveal the “subcutaneous strata” of social structure and bring the opposing elements of that self-same society to the light. According to Turner, in fact, *social dramas* have the propensity to activate *oppositions* within groups, social classes, ethnicities, social categories, crystallized roles and statuses, transforming such oppositions into *conflicts* which, in order to be resolved, require a critical revisiting of particular aspects of the socio-cultural system, a critical reconsideration which reaches a point of *validity* and *effectiveness*.

Such critical reflection usually takes place in *phases of passage* from an institutionalized cultural situation to new spontaneous aggregations, which can originate in the act of tracing new and unfamiliar lines within the territory of *socio-cultural liminality*.

According to Turner,

liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in the sacred space-time, and it may involve also subversive and ludic (or playful) events. The cultural factors are isolated, as far as this is possible to do with plurivocal symbols [...] such as trees, images, paintings, dance figures, ecc., each of which may assume not one, but diverse meanings. Then, these cultural factors or elements can be recombined in many, often grotesque ways because they are arranged according to possible or imaginary combinations instead of those which are dictated by experience: thus the disguise of a monster may unite human, animal and vegetable traits in an “unnatural” way, while the same traits may be combined in a different way, albeit always “unnatural”, in a painting or as described in a story. In other words, in liminality people “play” with elements in the sphere of the familiar and renders them unfamiliar. Novelty is born from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements.

In good part the *liminal* represents a practice of social hybridization, a border zone in which potentially new cognitive paradigms might arise. Turner highlights how «the essence of liminality consists in the breaking down of culture in its constitutive factors and in the free or “ludic” re-composition of the same in every and any possible configuration, irrespectively of how bizarre».

In this free and experimental cultural sector, new socio-cultural elements and new combinatory rules might be introduced, and above all it is possible to effect a «critical reflection on the socio-cultural elements themselves beginning with the performative *mise en scène* of one’s own body».

The passage from Ottoman culture to the *modernization* of the state which takes place in Turkey, starting towards the end of the 1800s, is a clear example of this *liminality*. In fact, in this case, we see the redefinition of different forms of performativity – in many instances such redefinition translates into a deponentiation of performance forms which develops via processes of *touristication* and *folklorization* (in the most pejorative sense of such neologisms). The same counts both for Karagöz and for belly dance. A valid attraction for those who, from the outside, without too much effort, seek a stereotypical image for touristic fruition and consumption. As if one could take the small plastic models of the Colosseum or the Tower of Pisa (in those kitsch glass balls which, when shaken, simulate snowfall) for the *authentic* surrogate of the Colosseum or the Tower of Pisa. Nevertheless, those small plastic models are cultural products which construct the concrete horizon of a new social narrative.

We are therefore reminded, through Turner, that *social dramas* may take place also in industrial and post-industrial societies, in the event of a *passage* from one cultural phase to another, when the eventhood of life itself no longer draws its sense in terms which were previ-

ously held as valid, and the production of a new cultural perspective for certain aspects of life in society becomes necessary. At times *social dramas* can take shape in the emergence of *new social and cultural oppositions* which arise and break into the parameters which until then found legitimacy in tradition and institution, invasions which at times take on the features of real *revolutions*.

In large scale modern societies, social dramas may extend from the local level to national revolutions, or right from the start take on the form of a war between nations. [...] In our industrial societies we are familiar with oppositions between classes, sub-classes, ethnic groups, sects and cults, religions, political parties and associations based upon the division of labour or the sense of belonging to the same sex or the same generation. Other societies are internally divided into traditional castes and corporations. Social dramas tend to activate these and many other classificatory *oppositions* [...]. Social dramas have the power of transforming these oppositions into *conflicts*. Social life, therefore, also in its moments of apparent quietude, is eminently “pregnant” with social dramas.

With regards to dance forms, it would be useful to note certain characteristic features proper to these performance modes. In the Ottoman society of the late 1800, in fact, we have the forms of *Chengis* and *Köçeks*.

Raks is the name given to Oriental dance, representing one of the favourite forms of entertainment in Muslim society. Across the globe this dance has become the symbol of Oriental performance cultures.

Late nineteenth century Ottoman society enjoyed this kind of performance in particular, a mode which combined musical enter-

tainment with dance. It can be considered as a form of spectacle performed by professional dancers grouped in dance companies proper. Some of these professional companies were formed by male dancers, the *Köçheks*, whereas those formed by female dancers were called the *Companies of dancing girls*. Notice that we have no trace of mixed groups.

The female dancers were called *Chengis*. Female groups gave shows exclusively for women and were considered on an equal footing with actresses. They had a leader, a few assistants to the leader, twelve dancers and four female musicians who played string instruments called *saz*.

The leader of the group was generally a woman of experience, according to several historical records she was known to all as a lesbian who had spent all her life in the company of female dancers. Her house served as a sort of academy for future leaders, and this particular element allows us to consider the forms of transmission of this artistic learning, which was not assigned to Academies or similar institutions, but trusted to the tradition of individual transmission which is proper to forms which include the presence of a *capocomico* (a phenomenon present also in Italy, as this term implies). The beauty, the grace, the skill of movement and the playfulness of the *Chengis* attracted many men. It was a well known fact to Ottoman society, however, that the *Chengis* preferred the love of women.

The *Chengis* were hired to entertain weddings, ceremonies which lasted several days. The group stayed at the house of the host for the entire duration of the wedding, entertaining the people invited. The arrival of the company was always an exceptional event. The beauty of the *Chengis* and their vivid costumes were a point of attraction for the men. Their rooms were kept in the area of the house reserved for the Harem. Admission was prohibited to both the other residents of the house and to the guests.

In many accounts describing the *Chengis*, travelers refer to splendid long hair and bodies wrapped in transparent clothes, with skirts trimmed in gold and embroidered belts, made in such a way as to leave the breasts bare during the dance. They carried cymbals in their hands, and the rhythmic movement of their shoulders and of the pelvis animated an extremely sensual dance which held all the spectators captive.

In many of these chronicles there is a diffused reference to their change of costume, which allowed them to return dressed as young men, throwing the female spectators into raptures.

This *liminality* of gender is of great importance. First of all, such gender shifting is an essential trait of all performance traditions. Masking, ambiguity, hermaphroditism are all strong signs of transformation. The *masculine* and the *feminine* are privileged spaces of social representation and the recent phenomena such as trans-genderism, cross-dressing, trans-sexuality, all have traditional roots and take on a thousand different forms which change from society to society.

Besides, it was a widely known fact that great part of the *Chengis* had lovers among the well-off women and the middle-aged widows of the city. This particular element ought to furnish food for thought with regard to the *liberal* traditions of the West, traditions which up to this day have been marked by a strong homophobia, nourished, in the feminine sphere, by infinite silences and censorship.

In the course of performance there was an open activity whereby dancers sent intimate messages to their lovers via explicit gestures which constituted a concretely seductive element of central importance to the dance itself.

It was customary among the public to attach gold coins to the

bodies of the *Chengis* during the dance. This practice also became an essential element of this laic and profane rite, allowing for the intricate plot of invites and messages to develop further. It was habitual for the *Chengis* to spend the night in the company of a woman, after the show. Such behaviour was all but condemned, as the *Chengis* enjoyed much fame and were very much sought after in Ottoman society. They distinguished themselves for their beauty and their charm. The majority hailed from the gypsy communities of the Balkans, although at times one could also find non-Muslim girls among them.

The male dancers, the *Köçeks*, were also much sought after in Ottoman society. They worked in groups, similar to those of the female dancers, which were named after the leader. Each company was generally made up of 30 dancers and, in exceptional cases, could even number between 200 and 300.

The *Köçeks* were the most popular attraction of Ottoman nighttime entertainment. These young men, experts both in dance and in music, having developed their craft to a high level of sophistication, wore female clothes and danced for the Sultan on all occasions. Some of these dancers wore broad trousers called *Şalvar* and provoked the envy of the women of the Harem. The *Köçeks* had long curly hair and wore very colourful garments, golden bodices hemmed with embroidery and silken skirts donned with bells. They also wore makeup and, like the *Cenghis*, they held cymbals in their hands.

Also in the case of the *Köçeks*, their dance was characterized by a marked erotic emphasis and it was openly oriented towards provoking the sensuality of the public. Male spectators did not hide their arousal during the performance and participated in very obvious ways to the growing erotic frenzy of these performances. The *Köçeks* were a strong object of desire, and the famous painter Enderun Fazil Bey portrayed some of the dancers of his epoch in a book entitled *Chenginâme*. Although in the title he obviously refers

to the female dancers, actually the book is dedicated to their male counterparts, singing their praises in a most obscene way:

«Egyptian, harmonious and unique in form and figure. He is a Jew. When he starts dancing he drives all crazy. He has many lovers. And the mere sight of him walking gives great pleasure».

Also in this case, therefore, a total *normality* seems to transpire in the expression of homosexual desire and seduction. And therein lies the obvious reference to a mechanism of playful contrast, related to the place *par excellence* for pleasure and ambiguity, for the care of the body and the promise of sensuality: the Turkish bath.

According to Turner, within the phases of crisis, of transition, of cultural change, new cultural modalities are devised in order to face the crisis, to comprehend and supply it with meaning, and at times also to resolve it. For the societies we live in, auto-analysis, a critical reflection of society itself, the re-evaluation of our social behaviour, the metaphorical presentation of modalities in which one may find a response to socio-cultural ambiguity, finds its place in *artistic* expression.

Precisely what the members of a tribe do when they fabricate masks, disguise themselves as monsters, pile disparate ritual symbols, invert or parody profane reality in the popular myths and legends, is repeated in the entertainment genres of industrialized societies such as theatre, poetry, the novel, cinema, sport, classical and rock music, the figurative arts, pop art, etc.: these *play* with cultural factors, assembling them in combinations that are usually of an experimental character, at times casual, grotesque, improbable, surprising, upsetting. Only that they do this in a much more complicated way than that which takes place in the liminal phase of tribal rites of initiation, since specialized genres of artistic and popular entertainment (mass culture, pop culture, folk culture, high culture,

alternative culture, avant-garde culture, etc.) multiply, in contrast with the relatively limited number of the symbolic genres in a “tribal” society, and internally each of those genres leave ample space for writers, poets, playwrights, painters, sculptors, composers, musicians, actors, comedians, folk singers, rock musicians, and for the “producers” of culture in general to create not only strange forms, but also, and with sufficient frequency, models [...] which contain a severe criticism of the *status quo*, in part or in its entirety». These genres, which provide for the possibility of undertaking free experimentation within the domain of mass culture, allowing for a reshuffle of the pieces which define a shared, collective imagination, are the products which Turner calls *liminoid*. For Turner, «(the “oid” comes from the Greek *-eidōs*; form, model, and it means “resembling to”; the “liminoid” *resembles* the liminal without being identical to it).

What is *liminoid*, therefore, resembles the *liminal* in its being characterized by a transformative potential. After all, Turner gives great importance to action through *play* and *amusement* in Western societies – indeed, via the element of free and spontaneous experimentation which *play* affords, it is possible to *live specific creative experiences*, thus learning to take apart and to fragment our collective imagination, reconnecting cultural elements according to unusual logics of aggregation and reflecting upon the existing universe of values.

Flicking through the Karagöz plots collected by Metin And, we get a glimpse of a gallery of types and situations which indicate a horizon of social figuration that is of immense utility for the comprehension of a complex and articulate social dynamic.

These stories, upon careful examination, echo a repertory which is well known among us, in the plays of Totò, of Peppino De Filippo, of Erminio Macario, that is to remain within the Italian context.

Social figurations, as defined by the sociologist Norbert Elias, are based on the concept of an interdependence between human beings. In this sense, figurations have to be understood in terms of dynamic processes. According to this perspective, beyond static conceptions it is also necessary to totally overcome the dualistic idea which sees Man and society simplistically put one against the other, *qua* two diverse and antagonistic entities.

The following are some of the most widespread and well known Karagöz plots:

Karagöz and the poetry competition - Karagöz participates to a poetry competition between bards and beats all the poets, who one by one exhibit their bizarre ways and costumes. He wins the first prize not because of his talent in improvising poetry, but because he is valued for his roughness and misbehaviour.

The madhouse - Karagöz, having spoken for a long time with mad people who escaped a mental asylum, shows signs of infirmity. Hacıvat locks him up in a madhouse and chains him. Some make fun of Karagöz and a doctor prescribes him some absurd medicine in order to cure him. Finally, Hacıvat saves him from the madhouse.

Yacivi (the public clerk) - Out of work, as usual, Karagöz is enrolled as a public clerk in a shop haunted by ghosts, where he writes nonsensical letters for his clients. In the end he is persecuted by a *djin*, a spirit, hired purposefully by Hacıvat.

Salıncak - Karagöz and Hacıvat rent their clients a swing. Karagöz cheats his partner Hacıvat of his part of the earnings. Hacıvat disguises himself as an old lady to unmask the culprit. A Jew comes along and he pretends to be dead. What follows is a burial scene in which other Jews carry a coffin in order to frighten Karagöz, who heaves the dead Jew onto the coffin.

Agalik (Karagöz, the rich man) - Karagöz becomes rich by betraying the trust of a rich Persian who had trusted him with a big sum of money. He then seeks to do business with all those who wish to work for him.

Orman (the forest) - Karagöz, running an open air bar, becomes the unwilling accomplice of some bandits. Having robbed many travelers, the bandits are eventually caught.

Kirginlar (offended) - Karagöz kills Hacivat and his brothers, then hides them in a huge vase upon which he sits. The witty son of Hacivat manages to move Karagöz from his seat and thus discover the murder. Tuzsuz seeks to punish him, but then he forgives him.

Cazular (the witches) - Two rival witches have a son and a daughter respectively. The latter are lovers but they fight. Each one complains with the mother about the other. The two witches have a dispute in the course of which many people are transformed into animals.

Sahte Gelin (the false bride) - Karagöz disguises himself as the bride of Matiz to cheat him into promising to quit drinking. On their wedding night, when Matiz raises the veil of his bride and finds the bearded Karagöz, the drunkard learns his lesson.

Sunnet (the circumcision) - Karagöz, although he is a grown up man, is circumcised like a child against his will. The ceremony foresees the shows and entertainments usually put up in order to distract the boys who lie on the bed after having been circumcised.

Buyuk Evlenme (The big wedding) - A long parade exhibiting the dowry of the bride takes place. On the wedding night, Karagöz's bride delivers an impertinent and shameless son who, just born, swears in an obscene and blasphemous way.

Meyhane (the Tavern) - The adventures of the famous drunkard *Bekri Mustafa* are narrated.

Hamam (The public bath) - Çelebi, the dandy, has inherited two public baths, each of which is run by a woman known to be a lesbian. The woman gets angry and leaves the public baths unattended. Noting the profit they make, Çelebi wants to keep the baths functioning and asks Hacivat to help him. In this way the two are reconciled. The jealous Karagöz watches his wife from the window of the bath. A fire breaks out at the public bath and all run out, including Karagöz, who escapes with half of his beard burnt, because a Persian vendor of *benné* had mixed arsenic with the *benné*. Karagöz is desperate, because without the public bath he will lose all the clients of his spice shop situated right across.

Odullu yahut Karagöz'un Pehlivanligi (Karagöz the Wrestler) - A girl's rich father dies, having previously established that his future son-in-law would be one who succeeds in beating his daughter at showdown. This is no mean feat considering that the girl is very strong. Many have tried but without success. Finally the suitors ask Hacivat whether he knew anyone able to beat the girl. Karagöz succeeds, but the girl's mother posits yet another condition: that he beats all the other contenders. Karagöz accepts this challenge also and beats all the other characters. Thus, Karagöz conquers the girl.

Bahce (The Garden) - Çelebi has a garden. He trusts Hacivat with the task of taking care of the garden and Hacivat assures him that he would transform it into a garden of pleasure. Karagöz asks Hacivat to employ him, but the latter refuses. Several persons enter the garden. When Matiz arrives, he says that a respectable neighbourhood cannot have a pleasure garden, so he closes it down until a license is obtained.

This gallery of stories, characters and incidents highlights the skill held by Karagöz and by the other characters to adapt and make do.

Theft, fraud, travesties, chases, brawls, failures. Such a repertory, of course well known in film with the comedies of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, or in the already cited exploits of Totò, propose a social type and a diagram of relationships between men and women which constitute the *social drama* of a given society.

Moreover, all the settings, the developments of the schemes, constantly furnish, in fine filigree, a precise image of the articulate context of the characters' lives. Sacred and profane, idealism and material life are enmeshed in a context which is not a *naturalistic* representation of social relationships, but which, from a paradoxical and discontinuous perspective, is an estranging critical stand in relation to the living social context.

Adopting Turner's conceptual framework, we could say that the *liminoid* and the *liminal* represent *performative zones of social meta-commentary*.

Turner attempts to grasp the processual function of cultural symbols via a *comparative symbolism*. Cultural symbols are considered by Turner to be dynamic socio-cultural systems, vehicles of active transformation within an active social and cultural sphere, one that is operative and legitimate.

Via the breaking down and putting back together of familiar cultural symbols it is possible to attribute meaning to *social dramas* which present themselves in the *liminal* phases of socio-cultural dynamics.

Following social mutation (which might also be dramatic), through *the staging of our-body-mind* and therefore via *performance*, it is possible to operate a *critical reflection* upon some crystallized social aspects and at times to bring forth change at some levels of society itself. It is evident, in this sense, that *performance* may be a critical response to socio-cultural change. This is extremely useful if the ob-

ject of analysis is oriented, as in our case, on a subject (Turkey, the Near East, Islam, Ottoman culture) which is often pregnant with commonplaces.

According to Turner

the term *performance* derives from the old French *par-fournir* which literally means “to furnish completely or exhaustively”. *To perform* means, therefore, to produce something, to bring something to its fulfillment, or to *execute* a drama, an order or a project. But in my view, in the course of the “execution” something new may be generated. Performance transforms itself. [...] Rules may “frame it”, but the “flux” of action and interaction within this framework may bring about unprecedented intuitions and also generate new symbols and meanings, incorporating them in subsequent performances.

Performance, therefore, has an experimental and, at the same time, a critical quality: by means of *psychophysical acting* it is possible to *live and fulfill an experience*, and in the *mise en scène* of our body it is possible to reflect upon that very *experience*.

One should, therefore, not neglect each transformation of the modality in which the body is represented during a given epoch. In this sense, the disappearance of the enormous phallus which characterised the figure of *Tarman* in many Karagöz scenes, at least until the 1920s, is of particular relevance. When did this censorship take place? What dynamic of domestication has determined the disappearance of such a clamorous and obscene trait?

On a more general level, *performance* constitutes a form of *social metacommentary*, that is, it represents «a story which a group narrates to itself and about itself». Therefore, on the one hand, it facilitates

the reading of the group's own *lived experience* via *the re-living of that same experience* or it permits to *live new experiences according to new modalities*. On the other hand, it favours a critical reflection on the real, allowing one to effect an *exploration, from the inside, of cultural symbols*, articulating the conflicts of the present and endowing them with meaning.

Turner himself affirms that «the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In a way, each type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre and poetry, is an explanation and an explication of life itself».

Via specific *theatre performance practices* and by means of the *mise en scène of our body*, the match between art and life experiences becomes ever more close.

Another very significant problem which derives from the analysis of the constitutive elements of Karagöz resides in the relationship with the shamanic element. Throughout the past century, our European tradition, branded by French influence, has given prevalence to the theatrical form of possession (to cite a famous work by Leiris). This element resulted in an unbridgeable distance from the forms of theatre grounded in shamanism. Such uncertainty is marked primarily by the prevalent African culture (on the side of possession) with regards to an *oriental* line (linked with the shamanic side). The evidence of the shamanic trait of Karagöz cannot but spring to attention, a trait that is evident both in its foundation myth and in the connotation of the central character, a *blacksmith*.

As Mircea Eliade has brilliantly underlined, there exists a link between the figure of the shaman and that of the blacksmith, as «by degree of importance, the craft of the blacksmith follows immediately that of the shaman». Again, according to Eliade, «blacksmiths have the power to heal and even to predict the future». Such a relationship with the figure of the blacksmith is obviously marked by

metallurgy, that is by the transformation of metals through the use of fire. The element of fire is clearly intimately linked with the production of shadows. It should, furthermore, be remembered that in many foundation myths pertaining to different traditions, the cave, fire, shadows are the constitutive elements in the birth of theatre (with Japan, China and India among the first).

As indicated by François Laplantine

identity and representation are not two distinct notions: instead they derive from a single affirmation, which tends towards the univocity and coherence of sense. From their point of view, there exists an already constituted sense, which is a matter of grasping and reproduction via language (in the case of representation), or of recovery and restoration (in the case of identity).

(Traduzione dall'italiano di Victor Jacono)

A few thoughts

Refik Erduran

Mainstream press in Turkey has been displaying a clear streak of hostility to theatre, giving vent to profound views like “That art has outlived its usefulness”, “It’s dying everywhere”, “What need for theatre when we have the cinema”, etc.

There is, however, a grain of truth in all that nonsense. “Theatre is boring,” they say. In general, yes, it is. Not everywhere in the world, but in Turkey. Now, why?

Because in our country it’s not quite “Turkish theatre”. In those rare instances when a text in tune with the public mood is carried to the stage skilfully, halls are filled, excitement spreads, and theatre makes an impact. Unfortunately the percentage of such events in each season’s total productions is minimal.

Why is that? Why is our theatre generally unexciting? Why is it “not quite Turkish”? Engin Cezzar pointed out the self-evident reason in a newspaper interview: “The gravest problem of our theatre scene is its failure to produce new playwrights.”

This is indisputably correct. A country that is as developed as ours and has a population as large as ours should have seen the emergence of at least a dozen fruitful dramatists in recent years. Failing that, at least as many aspiring playwrights should have raised hopes. A few of their creations should have excited the editors of culture pages and made stages lively.

Alas, we’ve had no such luck. Erhan Gökgücü told me this: “Prolific dramatists like Turgut Özakman gave up writing for the stage long ago. We’re left with only two persevering playwrights.”

This too is more or less true. And again it begs the question

“Why?” What the late Necati Cumalı said on a plane en route to a world congress with seven friends some years ago may offer a clue: “They really resent it when I write something. Well, soon they’ll breathe easier. We’ll all be gone, and they’ll be left with only the foreign goodies they love some much. Good luck to them.”

Who’s “they”? This bit from Müjdat Gezen’s *Book of Turkish Theatre* sheds light on that: “I must say that the level of intelligence of my colleagues, our theatre practitioners, leaves something to be desired. Almost all of them think they are contributing something to our theatre by importing a play they saw in the West and staging it here. The starting point of the formation of Turkish theatre is the emergence of the writer. A Turkish playwright will write, a Turkish director will direct, a Turkish actor will act, and a Turkish audience will enjoy the result. What else can constitute Turkish theatre? Our pseudo-Western artists keep putting our people to sleep both in the classrooms of conservatories and on stages.”

Can this state of affairs be expected to provide new and “old” writers with the enthusiasm to create for the theatre? Those “old” playwrights are the ones who made the greatest contribution to what is now termed the golden age of modern Turkish theatre several decades ago. There are many dozens of texts they wrote more recently that would energize the current theatre scene gathering dust on shelves, blocked by deliberate and systematic efforts. This being the case, why should young people or writers who have produced other kinds of fiction be encouraged to create new works for the theatre?

Reflections on the place of shamanic rituals in contemporary stage arts based on the play *Sacrifice*

Ayşe Emel Mesci

The crucial place that the unison of myth and rituals occupy amongst the roots of the ancient Greek theatre is frequently articulated. These two concepts might also be of use in understanding the representations of places that fall outside of the historical process extending (or assumed to extend) from the ancient Greek theatre to the modern Western one. Moreover, renewal in theatre is often intertwined with reversals to the roots. Therefore, research into the myths and rituals that comprise the foundations of different cultures might facilitate the diversification of resources as well as the foregrounding of intersection points that will allow the perceiving as branches of a single humanitarian culture accumulations that are otherwise separately categorized.

In fact, what I will try to do here is to reflect on what the Shamanic traditions and rituals, which are amongst the founding elements of the Anatolian culture, may mean for the present day stage arts and what might be their possible uses, based on a stage practice we initiated during the performance of a play in French language at the 1990 Avignon Festival...

A few remarks about Shamanism might be necessary.

Abdülkadir İnan lists the principles of shamanism as follows:

Based on the information provided by Chinese sources, the fundamentals of Shamanism in old

Central Asia were the Tengri, the sun, the moon, the earth, water, ancestors and the cult of fire (hearth).¹

The Chinese sources write that the various families which established states in central Asia after the Huns also presented sacrifices to the Tengri, earth-water, sun and the moon.²

Cosmologically, the universe is accepted as a structure with three layers: The sky, the earth and the underworld. The axis tying these layers together goes through a “whole,” and this door enables the deities, spirits and Shamans (people with preterhuman attributes) to travel between the layers. This concept of “travel” is the common focal point of all shamanic worship and rituals. Consequently, Shamanism is understood as a technique as well.

Some tribes imagine the sky as a tent, and others as a “lid.” In the cosmological sky conceptualized as a tent, the Milky Way is the stitches, and the stars are the “holes” through which light travels. The North Star stands in the middle of the sky, holding the tent stable like a stake.³ The shamans embark on their travel between the levels through the hole, which is also the pathway of the “World’s Axis,” sustaining the upright position of the imaginary tent. The belief that interprets the sky as a lid perceives the lid as sitting on the sides of the earth. Sometimes the lid slides a little and strong winds come in through the openings. The preterhumans embark on their journey in the sky by passing through these openings⁴.

The habitations of the people, such as tents or digs, reflect the

¹ ABDÜLKADIR İNAN, *Taribte ve Bugün Şamanizm (Shamanism: In History and Today)*. *Materyaller ve Araştırmalar*, Third edition, Ankara, 1986 (First edition, 1954), p. 2.

² *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³ To date, the North Star is sometimes referred to as the “Iron Stake” in Turkish, exemplifying the extensions of the Shamanic faith in language.

⁴ ELIADE MIRCEA, *Dinsel İnançlar ve Düşünceler Tarihi, (History of Religious Beliefs and Thought)* vol III, pp. 14-16.

symbols of this cosmology. The stakes of the tent, or the holes cut to let the smoke out are accepted as symbols of the “World’s Axis”, enabling the Shamans to climb up to the sky and converse with the deities. Communication (travel between the layers) is symbolized with the “World’s Axis” at the macrocosmic level, and with elements of the habitat such as the tent’s stake or the hole at the microcosmic level. At the mythical level, the most widespread symbols of the World’s Axis are the Cosmic Mountain and the World (or Life) Tree. The tree, with the aid of its roots, is also the mythical mediator enabling communication with the underworld. The other elements enabling communication with the underworld are the caves.

The caves were like doors connecting the underworld with the earth.⁵

In other words, there was a mutually constitutive traffic and a parallel environmental order concerning the human life and cosmology.

Looking at this briefly overviewed syncretic belief system through the framework of our focus, two elements immediately come to the fore: *projection* and *communication*.

Projection transforms the otherworldly being imagined by people into an environmental design that can be understood by the people themselves and a familiar field in which the most talented can gallop freely. Deities who have children like normal people, who speak, get angry or upset as well the possibility of establishing communication with spirits endows the whole worship with an aura of journey, and therefore a performance designating the journey.

The shaman establishes the relationship between the deities and spirits and the society, cures ailments, relays news from the future,

⁵ ÖGEL BAHAEEDDINB, *Türk Mitolojisi (Turkish Mythology)*, vol. 1, Ankara, 1989, p. 22.

protects the common memory by ensuring the intergenerational transfer of myths and rituals (and by training aspiring shamans). Therefore, their place in the sustenance of the societal identity is crucial.

The significance of the shaman stems from his/her establishment of communication between different layers of the earth through a *journey/performance*, and the special talents required by the performance. *The performance determines the central role of the shaman.* The path to theatre as we understand it is not as far as one may think.

The perfection of the performance is the precondition for the positive course of the cosmic flow, and therefore the least possible catastrophes in the lives of people, as determined through struggle with the nature.

The element of representation comprises a great portion of the shamanic ritual. These include “the beheading,” attaching the head to a stake, the head as watching the universe, on journeys to the sky or the underworld, as being torn to pieces and coming back alive. The ritual itself is a representation of the cosmic imaginary. There can, thus, be only one condition for the satisfaction of a crowd watching or participating in such a ritual: the good execution of representation. Do we, then, know anything about the criteria of “good” execution?

According to the beliefs of the shamans, the Shaman him/herself is not a magician, his/her biggest quality is the achievement of the state of trance and ecstasy. The believers do not respect Shamans who perform magic tricks, but who cannot attain the state of ecstasy during a ceremony. They look upon such people as charlatans.⁶

⁶ ABDÜLKADIR İNAN, Op. cit., p. 80.

Applying this fact as conveyed by Abdülkadir İnan to contemporary theatre terms, we can see that at the heart of the problem is whether the shaman can convince the audience of the “authenticity” of the ritual (journey) undertaken. But doesn’t the audience already know that what they are watching (or participating in) is not a “real” journey, that they know its fundamental codes and structure, that is it a fiction transferred from generation to generation and one that they have learned through participating/watching it many times in their lives? Their situation is not that different from the Indian audiences who know all the trickeries, knots and resolutions, and flow of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* myths but go to watch day-long showings, taking along their food and beverages. In such shows, *the process rather than the outcome, and the performance rather than the story* is being watched.

The same criteria might hold true for shamanic rituals. The audience is not concerned with the extent to which the person performing or guiding the show feels the moment of trance/ecstasy internally, but rather to whether this is reflected in his/her voice, gesticulations, and facial expressions, resulting in a presence that breaks everyday codes of behaviour. The crux of the matter is as follows: getting the audience/participants to accept that during the ritual they are in a different time and place and validating the rules of this different place-time. At this point, we are once again faced with the *characteristics* of a *play* that are inherent to the rituals.

Trying to decipher these traditions as a source of theatre, we need to focus on how the characteristics of a play within the ritual and the techniques used by the shaman enable bringing together a “sacred somberness”, “credibility” and “ecstasy,” and how he is able to move both those who are aware of the game and the believers with the journeys he takes between the earth-sky and the underworld. This is a crucial example of a *performance*.

The invaluable theatre historian Prof. Dr. Metin And observes the following about the shamans, which emphasizes their importance in turning towards the roots of theatre.

When one thinks of the multiple meanings of the word play, many of these will be seen to include elements of shamanic rituals. In these rituals, the shaman dances, creates music by using his voice and instruments, uses elements of imitation and drama by using his facial muscles and making abdominal sounds, and reciting poetry. Thereby, the word play and the roots of theatre, dance and other plays for audiences are comprised by the shaman and his acts.⁷

Moreover, elements such as the parts of shamanic prayers where the shaman makes fun of himself, his lute, and horse,⁸ encounter of obscene words in some prayers,⁹ the shaman offering alcohol to and getting spirits drunk to be able to gain access to the underworld¹⁰ are testament to the presence of comical and entertaining aspects of the shamanic rituals. The reality that Huizinga describes as «even though the rituals are bloody, the initiation tests ruthless and the masks grizzly, everything takes place in the manner of a celebration. ‘Real life’ has been suspended»¹¹ is certainly the case for shamanic rituals as well.

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Authored by Güngör Dilmen and staged for the first time in

⁷ AND METIN, *Oyun ve Büyü, Türk Kültüründe Oyun Kavramı (Play and Büyü, The Concept of Play and Magic in the Turkish Culture)*, Istanbul, 1974, p. 25.

⁸ ABDÜLKADIR İNAN, Op. cit., p. 143.

⁹ ABDÜLKADIR İNAN, Op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁰ ELIADE MIRCEA, Op. cit., p. 27. In fact, Eliade writes in this section that “the ritual comes alive and sometimes takes on a grotesque form.”

¹¹ HUIZINGA JOHAN, *Homo Ludens. Oyunun Toplumsal İşlevi Üzerine Bir Deneme (Homo Ludens. An Expose on the Social Functions of Play)*, Translated by : M.A. Kılıçbay, Ayrıntı yay., Istanbul, 1995, p. 40.

1967 in Istanbul, *Sacrifice* is one of the most competent examples of Turkish theatre literature. The plot is quite simple and bears resemblances to Euripides' *Medea*.

The story takes place in an Anatolian village, where Zehra's husband Mahmut decides to take on a second wife. Zehra tries to resist her fate initially through the regular means. She consults the women of the village, and their leader, the wise woman Halime Nine, she cries and begs, and tries to use her womanhood and being the mother of Mahmut's children to her advantage. In a subsequent "dream" scene, she understands that all her efforts, even the spells, are not enough to change the situation. At that moment, she decides to step completely outside of the traditions and write her own fate.

She rebels, and sets free the ram being fed to be sacrificed at the wedding. She refuses to open the door to the wedding party bringing the new bride home, and threatens to sacrifice her children if the new bride were to enter the home. At the end, when the wedding party tries to forcefully open the door, she kills her children before committing suicide.

Some of the references made and symbols used in the play (the hearth, a spell being cast on the bride in the dream scene, the dead bride coming back to life in the same scene, the myth of turning into stone narrated in the play and the turning of the whole wedding party in the stone in the final scene etc.), and most importantly the heroine Zehra reaching an almost "archaic" power towards the end of the play through a process that extends from her near history to the distant past of the Anatolian woman, and the women's choir endowing her with the task of "being the scream of the Anatolian women that has been silent for a thousand years," led us to approach this play as a journey that extends from history to our day. We were going to tell the story of a thousand years' Zehra. This choice coincided with the aims of the Folk Artists, who interpret theatre as a "synthesis between our cultural roots and

contemporary stage norms”. We undertook a reading of the play that would be conducive to such an interpretation and added a pre-play that included a stylized shamanic ritual, Zehra’s own wedding and folk dances, and the woman’s isolation within the home. We reinterpreted the dream scene, by initiating it with a shamanic healing ritual and conceptualizing the motive of the coming back to life of the new bride as a death-resurrection ritual that comprises an important place in Mesopotamian and Anatolian civilizations as well as shamanic beliefs. The tirade that Zehra narrates in the finale of the play, before she executes her last decision, sees her seek power in the hearth, the blue bosom of the God, and fire animals descending to the water. This endows the play with the necessary “archaic” power.

The play was staged in French, and included Turkish, French, Tunisian, Italian and Peruvian artists. The mellifluous quality brought by the differences of accent coincided with the journey we wanted to create. Wasn’t Anatolia – the thematic and musical background of the play – an example of multiculturalism itself?

However, we faced problems when it came to body language and gesticulations. How could we create a unity of expression?

How could we achieve an intersecting (if not common) ground of associations, and an appropriate coding between the stage and the audience as we tried to make the characters in the play credible and to bring the Anatolian culture to the stage? This was a serious problem. In a crowd where Zehra was played by a Turk, Mahmut by a Tunisian or a French actor, Halime Nine by an Italian, and the choir of women by Turkish, French, and Peruvian actors, trying to achieve conformity in body language through choreographic arrangements would mean losing a lot from the theatrical power of the play. The unity of manners had to be achieved down to the body languages of each individual character. Moreover, we were searching for the aesthetic body language not of ephemeral figures

of modern dance, but rather those who were close to the earth, felt its gravity and derived their strength of expression from bodily tensions. We were saved by the shamanic rituals, which became the fundamental element of our rehearsals. In fact, shamanic ritual “exercises” continued to be a fundamental practice in all our future rehearsals.

We used Radlov’s description for the shamanic ritual in the pre-play and Abdülkadir İnan’s narration in his book *Shamanism in History and Today* for the resurrection ritual in the dream scene.

The other supporting material we had were musical performances, documentary and animation films, research and the extensions of the shamanic traditions in Anatolian culture (plays for audiences, tariqas and folk dances, and information, observation and research on them.) The last element was important because it spoke to a particular stage of the journey we wanted to undertake, and it was the most concrete and easily accessible material.

Moreover, folk dances occupied a place on the borders of the play and the sacred, and could therefore guide us into the attitude and temperament to be adopted in stylized rituals.

Casting aside daily life, the dominant (if not the necessary) attitude of the action as joyful (the celebration can also be serious), boundaries concerning the time and place, the clash of a strict rule and a real freedom, these are the main common lines of the play and the celebration. The two concepts realize their closest unity in dance.¹²

The shamanist rituals and the accompanying myths have important extensions for folk literature.

¹² HUIZINGA JOHAN, Op. cit., p. 41.

The otherworldly adventures of the shaman, his experiences of descent to hell or ascent to the sky are reminiscent of the adventures of the characters in folk tales and epic literature heroes. In the last analysis, it is highly probable that many themes, motives, characters, images and *clichés* of epic literature have their roots in ecstatic traditions, as they are derived from the memoirs of shamans who narrate their journeys to and adventures in the preterhuman worlds.¹³

The narrations of the shamans, who describe in their travels the world of the dead in symmetry to the world of the living, discover the “geography of death” in the words of Eliade and develop themes on the “mythology of dead.” It is their narrations that bring death to the knowledge and thoughts of people, coding the world of the unknown and thereby constituting one of the important sources of the development of thought and literature in Anatolia.

The Turkic shamans who relayed news from the future, changed weather conditions, prevented or bestowed upon the enemy disasters, cured the ill, ascend to the sky, and did not burn in fires, found new lives through these attributes in the *Bektaşî menakıbname*¹⁴, and to a lesser extent those of other *tariqas*.¹⁵

It is unthinkable that while the myth continued to exist within literature, that the rituals as realization of myths would cease to exist in the appropriate channels in Anatolia, and especially the folk dances as the most conducive vessels. The bird figures (such as the crane or the eagle) that are still used in Anatolian dances are based on the shamanic beliefs of revolving around one’s own axis,

¹³ ELIADE MIRCEA, Op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁴ Texts including the miracles and lives of the elders, heroes or the holy persons.

¹⁵ OCAK AHMET YAŞAR, *Kültür Tarihi Kaynağı Olarak Menakıbnameler (Menakıbnames as a Source of Cultural History)*, Second edition, Ankara, 1997, p. 11.

comprising elements of trance and ecstasy The drum is one of the main instruments of these dances, and it is also the main helper of the shaman in rituals. In some Anatolian folk dances the impact of the shamanic ideas on expelling genies is observable. There are also many dances on the theme of death and resurrection.¹⁶

Practicing all these dances and shamanic rituals helped the actors to break the moulds of their everyday behavior, to get to know their bodies in a novel way, and therefore contributed greatly to the play. Another benefit of the shamanic rituals was the establishment of the common codes previously elaborated on. The Turkish actors were naturally closer to the dances, the music used and most importantly the rhythm. They were, in one way or another, a part of their cultural background. However, the shamanic rituals were equidistant to all because it was impossible to access the ritual (even in its stylized form) through the attitude and temperament of folk dances. The folk dances were helping elements, however the ritual stood on the borders of acting like someone else and being someone else, trance and awareness, ecstasy and bodily sovereignty. Therefore, its use of energy and extraordinary field were different from the folk dances. Practicing the shamanic ritual enabled the deconstruction of ordinary molds of balance. The travel between the “acting as” and “being” enabled the discovery of bodily possibilities, and the constant repetition provided the exercise of a certain sovereignty over them. It became easier to further the bodily language by developing new tensions and countermovements based on this sovereignty. It must be acknowledged that awareness of Meyerhold’s bio-mechanical exercises helped significantly in our approach.

To proceed accordingly, we tried to execute the shamanic ritual process in reverse. In the ritual, the element that fires, intensifies and concentrates the common energy and the bond formed is the shaman. The shaman needs to convince those who are watching or

¹⁶ See AND METIN, *A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing*, Ankara, 1976, Dost yayınları.

participating in the ritual, make them part of the ritual and guide them towards the desired aim. The shaman is therefore the energy focus of the show. When we practiced the shamanic ritual on stage, the practicing actor was surrounded by all others, who conveyed to him the collective energy through the music they played and their voices.

Another important attribute of the ritual is rhythm. Identifying one's self with a constantly played rhythm while also "being that rhythm" and being aware is a pre-extacy stage. These rhythm practices were an important part of the ritual preparation and an overall actor's practice. For the use of different sounds and energies, another important element of the shaman character, breathing exercises were necessary. The shamanic ritual practices benefited us with the realization that breathing is not a technique that includes only certain parts of the body, and thought us to combine imagination, concentration and energy to be able to make the breath travel within the whole body.

One of the most important characteristics of a ritual is the repeated movements. This repetition is exercised to such an extent that one does not only repeat her own moves, but the movements of the different participants converge towards similarity throughout the ritual. In this sense, the ritual resembles a helix. Each action is a circle within itself, and when a circle is completed, the participant proceeds to the higher level, where a new action begins. The element of individual and collective repetition is the cornerstone of control over the body language and therefore freedom on the stage. If you are aware of the constant individual repetition of movements that converge towards similarity with the movement of others, after a while you might start to feel your body and eventually see your stage picture from afar. This last stage is often the result of a lengthy process. A rule necessitating the repetition of the same movement

can eventually open the door to a stage freedom that enables you to observe yourself from the outside.

In all honesty, it was only in hindsight that we recognized this to be a benefit of the shamanic ritual that we practiced for the play *Sacrifice*. However, it became permanent with our subsequent stage practices, and we still use it to date.

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Euphoria, the pre-extacy moment of exaltation might be one of the sources of the lyrical poem. As the shaman prepares for the trance, he plays the drum, calls upon his helper spirits, speaks “a secret language” or the “animal language, imitating the screams of animals and especially the chirping of birds. At the end, he enters his trance, which animates linguistic creation and the rhythms of lyrical poems. *One must also remember the dramatic characters of the shamanic session, which create a representation that is unmatched by the world of everyday life.*¹⁷

Rhythm, poetic elements, a bodily sovereignty that enables the trance and ecstasy to become a technique, an extraordinary imitation talent with regards to both voice and animation, an imagination that lifts the boundaries between a dream and reality, and a performance that brings all of it together...

A few elements that led us to evaluate the shamanic ritual as one of the sources of theatre.

Shamanism sustains the “play” characteristics as defined by Huizingia alive on the one hand, while also laying the foundations

¹⁷ ELIADE MIRCEA, Op. cit., p. 29.

of oral literature and folk poetry with its narratives and folk dances with its rhythms and dances. It is not only an important source of Anatolian culture, but also a resource that awaits being used in contemporary theatre arts as well.

The shamanic ritual could be of significant help in breaking the molds of everyday life behavior on stage, to bring an awareness of stage time and location to the actors, to reach a body language where the most rigid rules intersect with the freest improvisation, to achieve an animation that is both collective and individual, with different energies, and to endow theatre with an earthy dynamism. If only one uses it after a healthy analysis of its characteristics of play...

Medieval Arabic Shadow Theatre: a laughable tradition

Fatima Sai

I remembered Averroes who, within the circle of Islam, could never know the meaning of the words “tragedy” and “comedy”. I told his story; as I went on I felt what that god Burton mentioned must have felt – the god who set himself the task of creating a bull but turned out a buffalo. I felt that the work made fun of me. I felt that Averroes, wanting to imagine what a drama is without knowing what is a theatre, was not more absurd than me, who I wanted to imagine Averroes with no material except for some news from Renan, Lane and Asin Palacios.

J.L. Borges, *The search for Averroes*, in *Aleph*

The Syrian playwright Sa‘allah Wannus writes:

The shadow theatre has never attracted the interest of our scholars and researchers until the middle of this century, and under the stress of a sense of lack. Because the lack of theatre in our tradition was like a deep wound in our cultural pride. That’s why we have spent big efforts to overcome these deficiencies, or to build a theatrical tradition that included this absence, to give completeness to our civilization untouched by any flaw. All operations encouraged by our insistent need to build an independent - and not queued - national cultural tradition. And it is after this that we started to take care of our popular arts to preserve and develop and build through them our artistic identity.¹

¹ WANNOUS SA‘DALLAH, *Ishkaliyyat fann sha‘by*, p. 15 in H. S. HIJAZI, *Khayal al-Zill wa asl al-masrah*, Damascus, Manshurat wazarat al-thaqafa, 1994, p. 15

Further on in his text Wannus can only report how the official Arab culture that has dealt with shadow theatre, has declared its disgust with such a brazen, foul-mouthed and obscene form of art, and have purged, in all ways, even the little it has attempted to preserve and transmit of the texts from all their deviant elements. Distorting, mutilating, relegating them to a dusty shrine of the academy.

But the French do not get indignant by Rabelais and also we Arabs do not get indignant of the Thousand and One Nights or the songs of Abu 'Uthman al-Jahiz, while the text of the Hammam's story, for example, appears riddled by ellipsis and parentheses which refer to erased terms or expressions²

The texts Wannus refers to here are those of Ibn Daniyal, the playwright lived in Mamluk Egypt whose name has become a synonym of the Arabic shadow theatre, risking to stay just a name. Today it is an important gesture to go beyond this simplification and return to the correct depth view of the Arab-Islamic tradition, giving the proper size to a form of expression that accompanied its cultural life for many centuries. It is important to point out that, although the material that has arrived to us is restricted, the shadow theatre is not to be considered an occasional phenomenon, nor limited to a period or geographical area. It is essential to explore the matter's bottom of these rich, surprising texts, enabling them to invade us peacefully with their explosive vitality. Allowing to our tradition to make us laugh again.

That of the Arabic shadows is a story that comes from a long and continuous tradition, welcomed by an open and transforming civilization. It's a story that speaks of syncretic results, born by the provision to malleability and penetrability, in spite of all orientalist

² WANNOUS SA'DALLAH, *ivi*, p. 19

biases, and by a cross-cultural and inter-regional communication within a huge area.

It is not easy to establish the history of the arrival of this form of art in the territories dominated by Islam. The main theories hold that the wellspring of this form can be traced in the Far East (two are the main assumptions: India or China). And later its spread would have been extended in the Near East, North Africa and al-Andalus, probably through diverse and multi-layered channels of penetration, involving both the popular level, the streets entertainment, no doubt in connection with the nomadic traditions, as well as the “high” culture of courts and literary circles.

Names and traces

The Arabic expression to indicate the shadow theatre is *Khayal az-Zill*. The term *khayal* has an ancient and precious tradition. Its semantic range covers the concepts of shadow, image, imagination, shape, dream, ghost, thought, representation, imaginative projection³.

The history of philosophy has used it, alongside or as an alternative to other synonyms and options, to translate the concept of *Mimesis* of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd). *Khayal* is the shadow of the beloved that appears to the poet in the camp in the desert, one of the most recurring themes of classical Arabic poetry. As of the end of the tenth century it began to indicate a form of live performance.⁴

³ The third verbal form, *Khāyala*, has the meaning of “to transpire, to veil, to let glimpse”.

⁴ See MOREH SHMUEL, *Live theatre and dramatic literature in the medieval Arab world*, Edinburgh University Press, 1992. Moreh’s suggestions show us in a precise way that the Arabic “dramatic” tradition was wide and included a large range of types of performing arts, and that the shadow theatre was only one of them, maybe even one of the latest.

The first and last meaning of *zill* is also shade, and it is the term that conceptually is opposed to *nur*, light, semantic couple founder of endless strands of speculation. The expression therefore, could be translated as Shadow's Figure, Shadow's Image, Shadow of the Ghosts, Phantom of Fantasia⁵. Or better, almost tautologically, as Shadow's Shadow, with an exquisitely Arab relish of repetition of a the concept with subtle nuances of meaning, producing a strengthening of the image of the illusion, giving sound to its essence of double as a dizzying *mise en abyme* in the shadow's world⁶.

The first evidence of this term used in reference to that form of representation which is played behind a backlit screen dates from the eleventh century.

The oldest evidence of shadow theatre comes from Egypt with Ibn Haytham (d. 1039) and Ibn Hazm (m. 1064) from al-Andalus, two very distant places of the empire. Some authors have argued from these texts that the differences between the two forms were so remarkable that it can be supposed that they were two completely different traditions. The description Ibn Hazm provides in fact, speak of a real theatrical machine, that gave life to the shadows on the screen, with fast and relentless turning wheel, to which were fixed the figures that come in, go out, dance, without any reference to a *mukhayyil*, that is, a person who directly moves the figures.

Egypt was then particularly rich of sources that give us the idea of the continuity of this genre. If during the Fatimid period (969-1171) we find the wit of Ibn Haytham, it dates back to the Ayyubid period (1171-1250) a well-known anecdote that tells of how Salah ad-Din himself (1138-93) attended in 1171 a performance of *Khayal az-*

⁵ According to Corrao's choice, who edited the Italian version of Ibn Daniyal work.

⁶ Strange there is the case of the semantically parallel etymology of the Arabic term *khayal* and the Latin *umbra*. They seem to be both deriving from the clouds, from the idea of the threat of rain.

Zill, deriving from this vision, moreover, a metaphor of human life in the world and the sense of political government⁷. Getting to the Mamluk period (1250-1517) which, if we should stop to the written testimonies, seems to be the apogee of the Arabic form of shadow theatre. The Chronicles speak us about the controversial report that the power at this stage had with a genre that was evidently an integral part of cultural life, by telling us of how the Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban Nasir ad-Din (1363) was accompanied by the puppeteers during the pilgrimage to Mecca, while the Sultan az-Zahir Gamqmaa (1438-53) banned the puppeteers and sent their skin creatures to the stake .

With the gradual decline of the Mamluk rulers, shadow theatre seems to be starting a new course and moving his capital according to the new rulers.

Ibn Iyas informs us that it was Selim I (1467-1520) to have brought the Egyptian puppeteers in Turkey.

Here the trail of possible strings vanish in the sands again, lost in the lack of certain documents.

In the following centuries, we witness the emergence of a new and better known form of shadow theatre in the region. With the Ottoman rise it starts the spread of the form, that claims and demands to be wholly Turkish: the Karagöz. This new representative tradition has also built its founding myth, with the death by decapitation and resurrection in the form of shadows of its two main characters, a myth that unfolds only within the Turkish world, all revolving around the new non-Arab dynasty which has inherited the huge empire.

The new character, with his stories, have quickly taken root in all the territories dominated by the Sublime Porte, even where no proof of earlier forms of shadows has reached us.

⁷The metaphor of the shadow theatre to talk about the meaning of life was much used by Arabic literature, in essays as well as in poetry, with a more or less mystical voltage .

In Egypt, however, strangely enough, we see the presence of another form of puppetry Araguz that only in its name comes close to the Turkish shadows. Actually, it is a puppet theatre form that does not involve any use of light, projection or silhouettes, and which is still widespread nowadays, but the strange assonance of which, we are not able to explain.

Amila Butrovich puts, in the most precise of the forms, the question to which no answer has been found so far:

Is it possible to argue that the Mamluk shadow play ceased in Egypt in its existing form and became reincarnated as, or at least absorbed into, the Ottoman Karagöz?⁸

As I said we do not have sufficient information to create the connections that seem obvious. We wonder, therefore, why have not survived many written texts of the scenarios of Khayal az-Zill. Wannus suggests that the reason should be linked to the fact that the “Master of Shadows” was a job that was handed down orally from father to son, in which the secrets were jealously guarded within a single family. And the texts were preserved in:

notebooks written in encrypted and unusual form, inserting extraneous letters between the original letters of a word, fearing that the secret of the art could be stolen⁹

And this, according to modern lists of Syrian and Palestinian corporations referenced herein. But the form of social organization of labor, which is the corporation, has a long life and wide it is its

⁸ BUTROVITCH AMILA, *The shadow play in Mamluk Egypt: the Genre and its cultural implications*, in, Mamluk Studies Review, University of Chicago, VII, I, 2003

⁹ ABU SHANAB ADIL, *Masrah ‘arabi qadim*, Damascus, Matbu’at wazarat ath-thaqafa, without date, quoted in WANNOUS SA’DALLAH, op.cit, note n. 4

documentation. It is also present in Ibn Daniyal's kitab:

In the Islamic world the operators of the show, including the flute players, storytellers, the trumpet and tambourine players appear among the list of trades drawn up in the famous text of *Rasa'il Ikhwan as-Safa* (X cen.). Besides these, there are also artisans of the iron, of the wood and, more generally, those involved in construction, as carriers of dust and stones. These trades were all needed to organize and prepare what was necessary to realize feasts, and it is not surprising that they are cited in the text of Ibn Daniyal. (...) Around the fourteenth century, in Egypt as in China, the corporation of fun entrepreneurs was being organized, called *arbab al-mala'ib* (masters of the games), *malabi* (jugglers), *muhabbadin* (clowns), *ashab al-hayal* (fantasists, actors and puppeteers), the *musba'badhin* (puppeteers), which were specialized in the organization of celebrations and entertainment and were considered among the poorest people.¹⁰

Ibn Danyal of Mosul and his Kitab

There is, actually, a more ancient text of that of Ibn Daniyal, which however, has not kept intact, called *Lu'bat al-Manar* (or *Harb al-'Ajam*) of Shaykh Su'ud, again of Egyptian ambience. The work, written in classic verses, is set in Alexandria and narrates an episode of the wars against the Crusaders, and it contains a description of the famous lighthouse that was destroyed by an earthquake around the eleventh century.

Among the characters stands the figure of Rihim, a

¹⁰ CORRAO FRANCESCA M., *Il riso, il comico e la festa al Cairo nel XIII secolo*, Rome, Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 1996, pp. 38-39

controversial brawler reminiscing of the figure of Pulcinella. (...) Rihim is also nicknamed Abu al-Qitat, name which also occurs in the second *baba* of Ibn Daniyal¹¹

Of Ibn Daniyal's text, *Kitab Khayal az-Zill* there are seven known manuscript. Four held in Egypt at the Dar al-Kutub, of which the oldest dates back to 1327. The fourth is at the Library of al-Azhar and is missing some parts. The most complete of the manuscripts is kept in the library of the Escorial in Madrid and is dated 1441. The last manuscript is in the library of Aya Sofia in Istanbul, dated 1424.

Also secondary sources are not numerous, since most prestigious collections or widespread biographical dictionaries do not mention his name, nor his works. The few traces that remain are often opposite to each other. While for some of the most important poets of his time and subsequent generations, such as al-Kutubi, his poetry was held in high esteem, a well-known compiler as Abdullah Jalabi (d. 1658) places the *Kitab* in the section entitled "Science of evil omens".¹²

Ibn Daniyal, Shams al-Din Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Huza'i al-Mawsili was born in Umm Rabi'in in 1248. He acquired his early education in Qur'an, science and literature in local schools.

He completed his studies in Mosul. Shortly after the Mongol invasion, around 1262, in his prime, he emigrated to Egypt. In Cairo he deepened the study of literature with important poets. In the meantime, in order to get his livelihood, he worked as an ophthalmologist in the popular district of Bab al-Futuh, despite he enjoyed financial aid of some patrons, such as the Mamluk emir Sayf ad-Din Sallar and, at least for a time, even the Sultan Baybars

¹¹ CORRAO FRANCESCA M., Op. cit., p. 44

¹² JALABI ABD ALLAH, *Kashf az-zunun*, Cairo, Matba'at al-'alam al-waqfia, pp.103-104

himself (1260-1277). He died in Cairo in 1311.

The little that we know of Ibn Daniyal and his life nonetheless, seems to us symbolic. It reflects the good fortune of cultural production and the crux that theatre represented at that time, as an allegory, in turn, of an entire historical period.

Ibn Daniyal is a scholar in the service of an emir, but he is also an ophthalmologist, companion of many other hacks on the market (...), but above all, what is more pressing to him is his condition of immigrant, of wanderer driven by events, and so is the protagonist, Tayf al-Khayal, a shadow coming from far away, driven by adverse winds of fortune.

“For God’s time has lashed out at us and acting cruelly separated me from my brother Wisal. I came to meet him in this country, only for him I emigrated from my country and I hope to rejoin him”.¹³

This presentation of the character Tayf al-Khayal makes resounding in our ears something that reminds of Gilgamesh and his desperate search for Enkidu. But in fact, here the author is addressing a thank to Baybars, bastion of the caliphate against Mongols and Crusaders who moreover, had received thousands of refugees like him from the devastated Baghdad.

Kitab Tayf al-Khayal consists of three works:

- *Tayf al-Khayal*
- *Ajib wa gharib*
- *Al Mutayyam wa al-Da'i al-Yutayyim*

The three texts are all set in Cairo during the reign of Baybars (1267-77).

¹³ CORRAO FRANCESCA M., Op. cit., p. 56

The setting therefore coincides with the empirical space-time of Ibn Daniyal.

The three *pièces* are preceded by a brief introduction that provides many important insights. Speaking directly to the Sultan, Ibn Daniyal writes that he has received from him the order to revive a genre that had fallen into decline, after having hesitated for shyness, fearing not to be up to the conventions of the genre, he has written these works with a “elevate and not low language” aimed at people of high rank, to make them think and have fun, since they contain truth and leisure, lightness and seriousness.

The first important news that we are given here is a testament of the pre-existence of the genre, which, we should argue, must have been long established. Secondly, we have the confirm that the shadow theatre was a point of contact between popular and high culture and the texts of Ibn Daniyal were a work of literature inserted into a precise strand with specific formal features and they are not to be considered a random episode, fruit of the imagination of a whimsical poet.

Tayf al-Khayal – Stray of Fancy

The first *baba*, a term that still means a single story within a representation that also contains others, is the one that gives the title to the entire collection. In turn, it takes the name of one of the characters of the comic duo that animates the story of this work. Since the very beginning we can see used the technique of descriptive or “speaking names”. Tayf al-Khayal in fact, can be translated as “the Wandering of the imagination” or Stray of Fancy. It’s the first character that comes on the scene called by the Master of shadows after a prologue. Tayf, as hunchback as the crescent or as heroic

scimitars, sarcastically thanking arrives. He starts to complain about the fact that the “market of pleasures” is experiencing a moment of restrictions, and that the sultan gave even the order to send the army of Satan in exile (here a curious hymn in praise to Satan starts). He is in search of his close friend, his raids’ companion, the prince Wisal, that is the prince Coitus, for whom he came to Cairo from Mosul. But here he comes:

a soldier wearing a three cornered head gear with
unkempt bristling moustache¹⁴

showing up like this:

Salute to those who are present in my environment and my words feel, those who know me will be delighted with my company, I introduce myself personally to those who do not know me at all. I’m the one who possesses every talent, better known as Prince Wisal, the smart, badass, cheat, overwhelming. I shot down the walls with my punches, I make the devil go crazy, I bite more than a snake, I carry more than a steelyard, I push more than a ram, stench more than latrine, steal better than sleep, I’m more pederast of Abu Nuwas, I grew up between Dakuk and Rafilas, Mamrur and Zamkalas; I have my entrances and my exits, I’m a bag full of vices and a basket of sins. I’m the torch in the hand of him who lights the fire, the wink of a pimp, I spank better than the hand of a baker and kick stronger than a merchant of rice. I twirl more than a rope, I penetrate more than an arrow, I devour more than fire, drink more than sand. I engrave more than bistoury, I croak more than a frog. I screw more than a screw, I’m rougher than a carder, I twinkle more than a star, spin better than a spiral, gulp more than a

¹⁴ BADAUIM MOHAMMED M., *Arabic Medieval Drama: Ibn Daniyal*, «Journal of Arabic Literature», Vol 13, 1982, Leiden, Brill, p. 94

mouth and I'm more deadly than poison. I challenged the devils and robbed the dead in their coffins. I penetrate forcing in the crowd and among the people I act perverted. I solve nodes even if they are of palm fiber. I'm a fellow in the night wakes, I gamble, I push, I'm a big slanderer, a backbiter, a censor, an intruder, I disturb and threaten, I'm a hermit, a murder, a drifter, a shameless, a deceiver, an infamous, a slimy, a pimp, a profiteer. But I dress stylishly, I lived loosely, I did the lord and the magician, I strutted and drunk, I cheated, jumped, danced, talked, told. And now that I have revealed my secrets you know my abilities¹⁵

A roaring introduction that can not fail to make us think of Petrolini's Fortunello, to which it is linked by the eternal tool of *paronomasia*, alliteration and nonsense.

Wisal decided to put his head straight and find himself a wife. So he asks to a bawd to find him the right woman. After having combined everything, they get to the wedding. After the long procession of strange, more and more strange companions (the last is the possessed grandson of the fiancé), finally the bride comes. When Wisal lifts the veil from her face he finds an ugly, repulsive old beldam, and he faints. The weird grandson of the bride smells his private parts and faints at his turn, with a loud production of unpleasant noises like burping and farting hearing which Wisal recovers his senses and realizes what happened. This trick was a revenge of the bawd against all the injustices she had seen and suffered in his life because of men, of whom Wisal is a perfect representative. In a rage, Prince Coitus would vent his anger against the bawd Umm Rashid, but by her old, dumb and impotent husband, he learns that she has just passed away. This fact is confirmed by the doctor who visited her on

¹⁵ CORRAO FRANCESCA M., Op. cit., p. 56

her deathbed, and witnessed his burial “in the toilet, behind the exit and near the entrance”. This sudden and tragic end inspired a wave of repentance in Prince Coitus and Tayf al-Khayal who decide to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, to purge their souls from their sins.

‘Ajib wa Gharib - Strange and Stranger

The second *baba* is entitled ‘Agib wa Gharib. Here too, the title is the name of the main characters and is a pun. ‘Agib means strange, amazing, and Gharib has the same semantic nuances of the word stranger including also foreigner, alien and strange. Taken as a whole the title is an idiomatic expression to mean something very odd and without an understandable sense. And that is just what this *baba* is. A story without a real story. With a sense that escapes in the twinkling of the succession of figures and details. At the end what it served to the public is a long parade of characters, all typical figures of the underworld of the medieval metropolis, who were part of what is called the Banu Sasan.

Irwin compares this series with another identical list of crafts and arts in *Kitab al-mukhtar fi kashf al-asrar* by Abd al-Rahman al-Jawbari (died after 1222). The comparison is impressive, so it can be assumed that it is probably a direct source, Ibn Daniyal just omits three crafts: “stone swallows, thimble riggers, singers and galli-galli men”¹⁶.

Among the characters of this show without a purpose, as if it were a declination of the idea of grotesque we find, in order: the snake charmer, the drugs’ seller¹⁷, the herbalist, the surgeon, the

¹⁶ IRVING ROBERT, *The Arabian Nights. A companion*, London, Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2004, p.137

¹⁷ CORRAO FRANCESCA M., Op. cit. p 67- 69. “The seller of the antidote against snake poison reports the list of ingredients to prepare the miraculous mixture exactly in the same order as they are mentioned in the *Canon* of Avicenna.

artist, the magician, the astrologer, the fortune-teller, able to cast out demons from the body of anyone: Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, with the right formula for each. Soon after a series of animal trainers begins, the first with a lion on a chain, the second with an elephant, the third with a goat, the fourth comes out with a cat to which he is teaching not to attack the mouse, then another individual with a kennel of trained dogs, then another with a bear, and even a man with a dancing monkey. At this point, two other characters of great interest the Sani'a, literally "the one who does", who has attracted the attention of many scholars, some of whom have identified her with a gypsy since she appears to the public as a tattoo artist and with the tools for female circumcision. Soon after is the turn of a young Sudanese who does weird things with his body, stretching his limbs and, with his hands, widens his eyes and mouth, beating on a drum and dancing. A sword swallower. Then a tightrope walker identified by the interpreters as Kurdish. A self-destructive lover who wounds himself and bleeds all the time for love torment

For those who I loved my madness is charm, patience marvels at the patience of my heart and of my tolerance of what my eyes have seen. My resistance has taken to lacerate the skin, and the eyes are the sheath of sword.¹⁸

Corrao sees in this character and in his words an allusion to the crazy "lovers of God", that's to say those mystics who pierce themselves with swords at the climax of the celebration of the *dhiker's* ritual.

The gallery continues with a torches' carryer, trade among the
(...) Ibn Daniyal by referring to Ibn Sina, shows to follow the medical school of the orthodox Arab-Islamic tradition and he precises that in making the character claim that his wisdom is based on the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides". Here's another proof of which is the authentic education of our author and of his participation in "high" culture".

¹⁸ CORRAO FRANCESCA M., Op. cit, p. 52

lowest, as he have to be available to everyone, he is the one who carries the torch to those who walk at night, and he's able to pretend to be Jew, Christian or Muslim, proudly belonging to the Banu Sasan. Finally, a caravan leader who organizes devotional trips. At this point Gharib falls in and rebuts this character with a short final monologue. In this that Badawi calles "Macabre Dance" everyone seem really *'ajib* and *gharib*, all strange, in the sense not just of freaks, but, as mentioned, real strangers, outsiders, all foreigners taking full upon themselves the strangeness and weirdness.¹⁹

Mutayyam wa dha'iy Yutayyim - Charmed and The Charmer

Also in this case the meanings of names anticipate the quality of the characters and the events that will be narrated. Here, indeed, Mutayyam means and is the one who is bewitched, and Yutayyim is the one who bewitches. The whole work is a mockery of the canonical conventions of Arabic love poetry, since the introduction that echoes the classical poetry's complaints of unhappy love. Mutayyam, who introduces himself as an alien coming from Mosul, informs the public that he had met the beautiful Yutayyim in a hammam and being tripped, he falled down for amazement. Thus he starts to describe with verses this masculine beauty that exceeds in grace every feminine charm. The homoerotic poetry is not a novelty in the context of the Arab-Islamic literature, so it is not the object that produces the comic effect, but the way in which it is described, with a perpetual distortion of the classical canons.

At this point, an ugly man arrives who turns out to be the former lover of Mutayyam, complaining for his abandonment. They start a verbal dispute, again referring to and mocking the tradition of disputes, respectively defending "what is small" and "what is big". Mutayyam then tells again the story of his ridiculous encounter with the object of his love, he speaks of the servant of Yutayyim, Bayram

¹⁹ BADAUIM MOHAMMED M., Op. cit, p. 103

who is the only person able to get the favor of his master. The servant, therefore, assumes a central role in this affair. Thanks to his eloquence he persuades The Charmer to realize three wrestling matches between animals, in which his beasts will oppose those of Mutayyam, in an increasing order of size: at first two roosters, then two rams, and finally two buffaloes. The fight scenes are of a high comic and erotic tone and produce a crescendo of tension and obscenity. Yutayyim cock succumbs, as well as its ram, but in the end Charmed let his buffalo lose to win the heart of Yutayyim. Afterwards a big party is made with a banquet prepared with the meat of sacrificed animals. Disparate characters are introduced at the party, as in the roundup of 'Ajib wa Gharib, but this time their peculiarities are erotic, and their names speak of particular and not canonically legitimate sexual practices, all came there to scrounge food and wine. Finally walking among this pile of corpses that had fallen asleep, Mutayyam meets the Angel of Death that came for him. Before dying, therefore, Charmed repents for the conduct of a lifetime and invokes the divine forgiveness with all the ritual formulas. The play closes with the scene of his funeral.

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REPRODUCTION FROM A LEATHER FIGURE
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On cover an image of *Karagöz*, reproduction from a leather figure of the master Emin Şenyer

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