

*The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947). The Paladins of France in America.* Jo Ann Cavallo. London/New York: Anthem Press, 2003, ISBN:9781839987663. Pp. 304.

The world of Sicilian puppets is a vivid and imaginative concert of adventure, chivalry, love and battle – magically construed over the course of hundreds of years by poets and puppeteers. The richness of the tales and the awe-inspiring puppets evoke a range of emotions and reactions in spectators regardless of their age or culture. What is at the heart of this artform? What makes the *opera dei pupi* tradition so impactful and what are the tales they tell? Answers to these questions and more, can be found in Joan Ann Cavallo's new book, *The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947). The Paladins of France in America.*

Currently one of the foremost scholars on Italian literature and Sicilian puppet tradition, Cavallo delves into the life and work of Agrippino Manteo. Her purpose is not just to pay homage to a man who was more than a puppeteer but an artist and a poet, but also to trace the cultural and artistic traditions that shaped his overall oeuvre. Her analyses of the history and scripts of the *opera dei pupi* bring to life the enchanted world that Manteo and others helped create. The quest for artistic expression, storytelling and entertainment is nowhere better highlighted than in the life of this Catanese puppeteer who immigrated to the United States with a set of tools and creative inspiration but little else in terms of resources. But this is not just a book about an existential journey – far from it. Jo Ann Cavallo brings us this carefully researched book to make an important point. She argues convincingly, and with detailed evidence, that the Sicilian adaptation of the Paladins of France was not a reductionist oversimplification of the Renaissance epic *chansons de geste*. Nor was the Sicilian version a watered-down duplication of a more illustrious French chivalric epic. In fact, and in true Sicilian form, the process of adaptation was so dynamic and fluid that Cavallo paints a vivid picture of creative and sustained elaboration. Building on the records and scripts left by Agrippino Manteo (and generously made available to the author by his family), she presents us with a genealogical discursive analysis of how poets invent. Cavallo outlines in her book how magic is created in the tales of the *opera dei pupi* and how this creative genius and cultural collaboration become the catalyst for the production of a quintessentially Sicilian tradition of epic proportions.

The book is divided into two parts with Part I focusing on “The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo and family.” The two chapters that constitute this part address the puppeteers and the scripts, respectively.

These pages provide a backdrop for Part II and explain the historical developments of Manteo's life and upbringing as well as those of his children. Part II focuses on "Select Plays from the Paladins of France Cycle," which is comprised of ten different chapters and an introduction. Jo Ann Cavallo takes each of the plays written and recomposed by Agrippino and analyzes each storyline, how it preserves some traditions and the ways it departs from common themes. She carefully unpacks Agrippino's masterful intellectual production, tracing the choices he made in storyline and in the subtle nuances of his linguistic and literary selections.

The Sicilian *opera dei pupi* has a long and exciting history of co-creation, rewriting and collaboration – a multilayered artform that though inspired by Frankish stories about Charlemagne and his paladins, nevertheless reflects the intellectual, performative and artistic skills of generations of writers and poets alike. In Jo Ann Cavallo's narrative history of this national treasure – also a UNESCO protected artform – 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century poets like Matteo Maria Boiardo, Luigi Pulci and Ludovico Ariosto, the 19<sup>th</sup> century writer, Giusto Lodico, and others have continued to be the bedrock of the Sicilian puppet tradition. The book traces how their work is interwoven with Agrippino Manteo's journey and his work and analyzes essential plays like *Orlando Innamorato* by Boiardo; *Morgante* by Pulci and *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto. Cavallo underscores Sicilian innovation and vision and debunks a perspective on chivalric epic as the product of separate cultures and elucidates instead the transnational character of the Sicilian version of the plays. The vast array of characters from across the Old World already attests to the vast scope of the Sicilian world view as opposed to a tendency to remain more culturally situated in the Frankish tradition. Moreover, she points out how the plays enfold common themes from the classics of the ancient world, such as Homer and Virgil. An emphasis on a wider cultural approach in the plays is evident in Agrippino Manteo's collected works, according to Cavallo, which is congruent with the Sicilian approach in the *opera dei pupi*. To Cavallo, the Sicilian approach departs from its Frankish counterpart in precisely this point. Boiardo and Ariosto provide an alternate viewpoint to the centering of religious and ethnic conflict, evoking instead motivations like love, loyalty, and personal ambition. Therefore, kings and conquerors fight over common universal desires like political clout and territorial expansion rather than issues of ethnic and/or religious difference. Similarly, Manteo's plays deliberately deflect from potential confrontations over the latter.

Jo Ann Cavallo's reading of Manteo's plays, contributes a nuanced understanding of the poet's style and thoughtful arranging of the scripts of

the plays he puts together. In her careful reading of his notes, she uncovers as well that in the course of recopying the scripts, Manteo would modify and rearrange the lines in various color pencils. His descriptions of the proceedings of action reflect careful deliberation and thoughtfulness. Though Manteo positions the French plays as central to his vision and inspiration, he draws directly from Renaissance tradition in his long stanzas and writes poetic verses which are original and unique, in Cavallo's view.

In sum, this book makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the historical background of puppet theater composing and directing. It makes a sound critique of commonly held generalizations about Sicilian puppet theater and offers a never-before-known transnational experience of one great Catanese puppeteer, Agrippino Manteo, and his innovative vision and passion. One missing element is a longer conclusion that could have tied the interesting arguments discussed in the volume more succinctly for the reader and could have provided a clearer closure to the themes explored therein. Nonetheless, the book is easy to follow and is laid out in a systematic as well as thematic scheme which allows the reader to use it also as a quick reference.

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*Mediterranean ARTivism: Art, Activism, and Migration in Europe.* Elvira Pulitano. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. ISBN: 978-3-031-05991-9. Pp. 235.

Elvira Pulitano's *Mediterranean Artivism* offers a rare and acute close reading of artifacts that complicate a simplistic reading of the current refugee crisis in Europe. Focused on the island of Lampedusa as the clashing hotspot where refugees from the global South are met with the legal barriers of global North on route to safety, the book carefully unpacks rusty metaphors of migration whether in museums such as the Louvre or on street corners in Palermo, Sicily. The book offers a multimodal lens to the study of aesthetics, politics, and the poetics of exile, specifically in the Black Mediterranean, and is composed of an introductory chapter, eight additional chapters and an epilogue. Whereas the chapter titled "Stones and Water: Monuments and Counter-Monuments" discusses the monument *Porta d'Europa* erected in 2008 on the southeastern part of Lampedusa and

the chapter titled “Boats and Cemeteries: Landscapes of Memory” discusses art created with the driftwood of the boats wrecked near the island, in the final chapter, titled “Watery Confluences,” Pulitano discusses *The Foreigner’s Home* (2018), a documentary directed by Geoff Pingree and Rian Brown featuring the 2006 exhibition in the Louvre museum. The epilogue focuses on two examples of ARTivist cultural practices and transnational solidarity, based in Palermo: *Moltivolti*, a social enterprise started in 2014 to celebrate diversity, and *Giocherenda*, a cooperation project run by young refugees residing in the Sicilian capital.

Located mid-way between Tunisia and Italy, the tiny island of Lampedusa marks the frontier between Africa and Europe. Quoting Igiaba Scego, the author asks why “is the journey guaranteed to those who travel a North-South direction and not vice versa?” (1). Not only is a journey northward not guaranteed, but the azure waters surrounding the island of Lampedusa are, in fact, a graveyard of thousands of drowned migrants. Those who do reach its pearly white shores are criminalized and sent to inhumane detention centers away from the tourists’ open vistas of sea and sand. There is hope in humanity, however. The author recounts numerous efforts to “help” migrants, whether in their home or the host countries. These friendship laboratories aim to “offer dignity, creativity, and new models of citizenship and belonging” to the stranded individuals (221). The author urges the host nations that they have much to learn from their migrants, as sharing is what will define the globe’s future survival or demise.

Pulitano bravely situates the right of migration and mobility as an international human right which has become illegalized for the disenfranchised in the past decades. The twenty-kilometer square island receives more than double its inhabitants in the form of asylum seekers from northern Africa, an influx that the infrastructure of the island is not ready to accommodate. The weight of caring for asylum seekers is usually borne by geographical areas that are struggling financially themselves. But Pulitano reminds her readers of the ravages of the global north, including the role and history of Italy in Africa and the Middle East, prior to the onset of current refugee influx. The Mediterranean is the fluid yet cement border between the two worlds. Moreover, Pulitano is open about the scope and limitations of her study. She agrees that the voices of the island’s incarcerated migrants are completely absent from the book. She questions her own ethical dilemma by positioning herself at once as a “tourist” on this land, a scholar with a sabbatical research agenda, and even as an exiled individual. She recognizes that having the privilege of coming back home does not qualify her squarely for the latter. Pulitano is also adamant not to distinguish between

asylum seekers and economic migrants who travel northward in search of a better life. Such distinctions are excuses for the governments to deny migrants what they rightly deserve, she argues.

The book is a valuable addition to the study of refugees and its forte is in close analysis of artifacts that point to the traumas of asylum seekers. It contributes to current debates on “TransMediterrAtlantic” scholarship. Despite the focus on art and activism, the book’s cover image is not appropriate. The digitally enhanced image displays a brown hand reaching out to a white luminescent one, which could be misread. But what the brown hand is pulling is not exactly a white hand, but a ghost of one, with shades of green and purple. Nonetheless, the book brings awareness to the shared fabric of the world we inhabit and the responsibility that fluid, imaginary borders create.

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