

PERFORMING THE LABORING CLASS: THE EVOLUTION OF
PUNCH AND JUDY PERFORMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

The commedia dell'arte stock character of Pulcinella found longevity as a puppet through the Punch and Judy tradition. From his origin in Naples, Punch was associated with urban workers. The longevity of the character provides an opportunity to view the ways in which the character changed between its birth in the early 17th century and the 20th century in response to the developing working class under the hand of various social groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

On May 9, 1662, the itinerant Italian puppeteer Pietro Gimonde, performing as “Signor Bologna,” produced a marionette puppet show in the busy market section of London’s Covent Garden. The star of his play was a little figure named Pulcinella, a Commedia dell’Arte stock character of Neapolitan origin characterized by a hunch back, a hooked nose, and a crafty and often violent disposition, especially when confronted with authority figures. The English, reeling from the repressive moral reforms under Oliver Cromwell, whose body had been exhumed and posthumously “executed” only a year before, were delighted with the ribald, anarchic antics of little Pulcinella.

The commedia dell’arte stock character and eventual puppet had, from its origins in the Italian Renaissance, been associated with urban workers, and according to Dr. Mariano D’Amora, was a symbol of the dream life of its people (D’Amora). Narratives surrounding this character reflected the ways in which audiences viewed urban workers, providing a case study for popular sentiment as his character and the situations in which he found himself evolved over time and location.

As itinerant performers brought the commedia dell’arte stock characters from Italy to Europe and Russia, the character of Pulcinella was often adopted by the host communities. His position as a begrudging laborer often resonated with individuals in similar circumstances, and the evolution of his interaction with authority mirrors the social and political changes that Europe underwent

between the 16th and 20th centuries.

The development of Pulcinella as a puppet is as much a product of economy as it is of politics. Within Italy, marionette puppeteers mimicked the style and narrative of popular *commedia dell'arte* troupes like I Gelosi and I Confidenti, who traveled extensively throughout Italy and Europe in the last two decades of the 16th century. These puppeteers followed market roads, setting up their great puppet booths wherever an audience could be gathered. Like in Italy, the audiences in the markets were primarily composed of household staff for the nobility and urban laborers, and clever performers on both the live actor and puppet stages learned to adapt content to audience tastes to maximize their profits.

As a *zanni*, or laboring servant type character, Pulcinella was a sympathetic character for these audiences. He differed from the other *zanni* in that, while his northern Italian counterparts, Brighella and Arlecchino, were often the subjects of brutality from the masters under whom they served, Pulcinella wielded a weapon against those who sought to demean him. Pulcinella's refusal to submit to authority may have initially been laughable in its audacity, but over time, it mirrored the development of class conflict.

In places where Italians often performed, the communities so embraced the character that he was adapted or inserted into existing puppet theatre traditions. In many cases, he was given new names like Bavaria's Kasperle, Holland's Jan Klaasen, France's Polichinelle (and his offspring Guignol de Lyon),

Belgium's Tchantches and Russia's Petrushka, and his character explored the folk tales and traditions of the existing performance tropes of rural faires and festivals in their adopted countries.

As a resource for theatre historians, Pulcinella provides an unparalleled opportunity to determine the ways in which politics and audience can shape an individual character over time. Few other characters have experienced both the longevity, adoption and evolution that Pulcinella has. By analyzing the changes to both his character and portrayal, the popular sentiments of Pulcinella's varied audiences may be extrapolated. To this end, this document will follow only one of Pulcinella's many lineages to demonstrate the ways in which politics, audiences, and social reform have shaped this character over a span of four centuries.

As with all investigations of historical theatrical performances, there are some significant relationships that become crucial to determining its context and historical value. In the broadest sense, the relationship between the government and its performing artists determines to what extent the material represents popular sentiment. Second is the relationship between the underwriter and the producer or performer, and whether or not the producers are allowed to maintain their own artistic license. The third, and perhaps most important, is the relationship with the audience, particularly when discussing commercial theatre. Theatre that does not appeal to the audience's sensibilities is not commercially viable, making it crucial to a production's success to cater to the tastes of their

audiences.

As a representative of the urban laborer, Punch was performed by and for both urban laborers and groups with more social currency. Because the character of Pulcinella, in the lineage of Punch, has an unbroken tradition of performance that is comparatively well documented and allows for malleability of narrative, his evolution provides an opportunity to look at the ways in which urban laborers are depicted over time by different social groups. The relationships between producer and their government, underwriter and audience critically shape the way in which Punch evolved in his English-speaking lineage.

It is also important to discuss the historiography utilized in this analysis of Pulcinella's evolution. Terminology used in this thesis draws from historical materialism, which assumes that changes in technology relating to the productions of goods are the primary influences on the ways in which societies organize themselves. Over time, society organizes itself around the level and character of productive forces, like raw materials, land, tools, technology, knowledge and other elements necessary to create the materials needed for human survival. As these productive forces become more complex (like in the progression from the feudal system of the 16th century, where our story begins, to the early 20th century), power becomes increasingly concentrated with those in control of the means of production.

In this context, "working class" takes on a very specific meaning that is relevant to this thesis. A working class individual sells his labor for wages, but

does not own the means of production. This distinguishes the working class as a category of persons arising from the Industrial Revolution, as the majority of individuals prior to the 19th century worked in agricultural enterprises, often owning or renting their own land, owning their own tools, determining the ways in which his labor was performed, and generally retaining the fruits of their labor.

This document uses the term “middle class” to refer to a class also arising from the Industrial Revolution, the *petite bourgeoisie*. These individuals encompass small scale merchants, artisans and individuals who manage production, distribution, or exchange of goods, or who provide services for individuals with capital. More importantly for this document, this “middle class” identifies more with individuals with capital (*haute bourgeoisie*) than with the working class, and attempts to emulate Capital’s perceived morals.

There has been significant scholarship on the evolution of Pulcinella and his transition into his offspring, Punch, of the Punch and Judy shows. Most often cited is the work of George Speaight (1914-2005), who was known as the leading authority on 19th century toy theatre. His book, *Punch and Judy: A History*, published in 1970, provides a well-documented history of the character and his research compiled for this book is now on permanent exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Also of note is Michael Byrom (1924-2011), whose many books on Punch and Judy, including a series of essays published as *Punch, Polichinelle, and Pulcinella: Miscellaneous Punch-Ups and Reflections*, often refuted the research

of other puppetry scholars, including Speaight. A more context-driven analysis of Punch's evolution, *Punch and Judy in 19th Century America: A History and Biographical Dictionary*, by Ryan Howard, will serve as the basis for much of the American scholarship, as his investigations into extant primary sources is admirable.

Primary sources, few as they are, include diary entries from Samuel Pepys (1633-1701), a member of the English Parliament and frequent attendee of popular amusements; John Payne Collier¹ (1789-1883), who attempted to chronicle a short history of Punch for his book, *Punch and Judy: Accompanied by the Dialogue of the Puppet Show, An Account of Its Origin, and of Puppet Plays in England* (1829); and Henry Mayhew's (1812-1887) interview of a Punch and Judy "Professor" for his book *London Labor and the London Poor* (1851). In America, the bulk of our primary sources are derived from periodicals, particularly in New York City, with an emphasis on the *New York Times* and *Harper's Weekly*.

Unfortunately, no scripts with any legitimacy are preserved, though there have been attempts (Collier's included) to preserve the traditional narrative. Punch historians must derive the evolving content of Punch and Judy performances from contemporary descriptions.

Notably absent from existing scholarship is a conscious effort to root Punch and his evolution in his context, both as part of a broader theatrical culture and in relation to his socio-political climate. To that end, this document will analyze the primary and secondary sources against current social histories,

including Erick Hopkins' *A Social History of the English Working Class*, EP Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, and David Underdown's *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, alongside Philip Dray's *There's Power in a Union*. Between them all, a narrative of theatrical evolution may be uncovered in relation to the socio-political changes over time.

Just prior to Punch's presumed inaugural performance in London in 1662, England had undergone a Civil War (1642-1651) during which the English peers teamed briefly with the "unwashed masses" to execute their king, followed by the Commonwealth of England (1649-53) and the Protectorate (1653-59). Under the Commonwealth and Protectorate, a number of morally restrictive laws were passed, including the closure of the theatres. After the restoration, the ribaldry of the English Restoration Comedy, characterized by sexual explicitness and dense plots, included significant social and religious satire.

The passage of the Licensing Acts in 1737 had a direct effect on Punch's evolution in that puppet shows, presumed to include only traditional material, were some of the only performances uncensored by the Lord Chamberlain. Famous actors and theatrical producers, among them Charlotte Charke and Henry Fielding, took to the puppet stages to continue production of their theatres outside of the purview of the censors.

The end of the 18th century saw the American Revolution from 1775-1783, followed by the French Revolution from 1789-1799 as questions of equality, sovereignty, and individual rights became the purview of citizens from all social

rungs. Within England, growing industrialization developed a new class structure that concentrated laborers in crowded areas that grew increasingly class conscious as their lots worsened. As English citizens protested for the right to participate in government and better working conditions, Punch joined him on the streets, the narratives to his performance growing increasingly anarchic.

As capitalism forged a new middle class in the mid-19th century, Punch found his way into nurseries and parlors, his violent raging against authority and social taboos reinforcing middle class stereotypes of the laboring classes.

The first evidence of Punch and Judy shows in America is recorded in 1742 in both Philadelphia and New York. In these early iterations, Punch was still with his first wife, Joan, and the two of them were still marionettes. By 1828, Punch had asserted his popularity in America, as can be seen by the publication of Punch plays, *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy* which was widely circulated and enthusiastically pirated the very year of its publication. By the end of the century, Punch and Judy shows were a feature of the American Dime Museum.

The spread of Punch and Judy (arriving on the West Coast in the 1850s) mirrors the expansion of the railroad and mobility of the working class in the United States. Punch and Judy shows became a mainstay travelling circuses and sideshows, and some of the more opulent saloons boasted regular performances. As the saloon-cum-brothel was regulated out of existence and replaced by the more respectable vaudeville houses, Punch and Judy shows moderated the

vulgarity of the language to gain access to middle class entertainment avenues.

Antonio Fava, noted Pulcinella performer and educator, writing from the Neapolitan perspective, articulates the appeal of the character across centuries and locations:

The existence of Pulcinella as the voice of the people, as the direct expression of a people ... is never questioned. The nineteenth century masterfully redesigns this character: he is ... the Human up to his ears in a world of wily, arrogant, self-interested, and undeservedly "superior" guys. Pulcinella is the expression of a human condition made foolish by those unable, unwilling, and never obligated to recognize dignity as everyone's necessary and common right. Pulcinella, a man without dignity, is nevertheless indispensable to us all: without his foolishness, his ignorance, his extreme credulity and sometimes his aggressiveness, none of his countless "bosses" could ever escape from the awkward tangle of troubles in which they find themselves. Pulcinella is everyone's savior, saved by no one. (Fava n.pag)

That Pulcinella wins as much as he loses in the traditional Punch and Judy scenarios demonstrates a profound understanding of the malleability of morality at society's lowest rung, while providing levity for a troubled population.

2. ORIGIN STORY: PULCINELLA IN NAPLES

There is debate amongst historians and practitioners surrounding the precise origin of Commedia dell'Arte, but a document signed in Padua in 1545 by the all-male troupe, Ser Maphio, is formally recognized by the modern international Commedia dell'Arte Community as the style's official birthday.² The stock characters of Commedia dell'Arte are traditionally associated with various Italian city-states, with Pantalone, the miser, associated with Venice; Dottore, the scholar, associated with Bergamo; and the Lovers associated with Tuscany, to name a few. These stock characters were required to be identifiable both as societal constructs and representatives of regional idiosyncrasies. Pulcinella is the only character with origins in the southern portion of the Italian peninsula to have achieved the sort of international longevity of his northern counterparts (namely Arlecchino or Harlequin), making his inclusion and evolution on the Commedia stages unique.

To understand the atypical development of Pulcinella as a Commedia dell'Arte stock character first requires some understanding of his place of origin. The history of the southern portion of the Italian peninsula, namely Naples and Calabria, is far too complicated to elaborate on in any great detail here. However, a brief summary of the relevant cultural and political milestones illuminates some of Pulcinella's particular characteristics.

Early Greek colonists settled on the island of Ischia on the Bay of Naples and a second, mainland settlement named Parthenope, in honor of one of the Sirens, overlooking the Bay. In 524 BC, they were defeated after a series of raids by the local Etruscans, who were unable to maintain control of the region. The Greeks defeated the Etruscans in a naval battle in 474 BC and built a larger trading post, which they called Neapolis (“New City”) further inland (Lancaster 12).

The population of Neapolis swelled to approximately 30,000 people as more Greek colonists arrived to enjoy the opportunities afforded a major trade hub. The colonists enjoyed the fertile soils of Campania, and soon began exporting wine, olives, tomatoes, lemon and grain to the rest of the Hellenic world (Lancaster 13).

This time of plenty encouraged the development of two forms of comedy. Greek *hilaro-tragodia* (hilarious tragedies), performed by the *phlyakes* (gossips), was developed in the Magna Graecia (as southern Italy was then called) cities of Syracuse and Tarentum. Unlike many Greek plays, they had no *komos* and relied on the strong imitative history of the early Greek mimes. Performances explored the comedic elements of Greek mythology and daily Greek life, incorporating a handful of Greek stock characters, most popularly Heracles, but also including Odysseus, the thief, the bustling slave, and manipulative old men and women. The subject matter for these plays, derived almost entirely from extant vase

paintings, show the stock characters attempting daily activities with meddlesome interruption by the Greek gods (Bieber 129-131).

The *fabula Atellana* (Atellan Farce or Comedy) developed between 350 and 300 BC by the Osci (a tribal grouping composed of Samnites, Aurunci, Sidicini and Ausones who lived in south central Italy), but was traditionally attributed to a small town called Atella, which was situated on the road connecting Naples and Rome (Butler 73). The productions were originally performed in the Oscan dialect and included four masked stock characters engaged in drinking, thievery, disguise and gluttony. The characters included Maccus, who usually had a starring role in the production and was a sort of roguish jester; Bucco, who was known for being both chubby and dim-witted; Pappus, who was an older man continually tricked or cheated by his wife or daughter; and Dossenus or Manducus, who sported a hunch back and was known for his cunning and trickery (Butler 74).

In the fourth century BC, Rome began annexing areas of Campania. Neapolitans declared war on Rome in 328 BC, but quickly brokered a treaty that granted Neapolis some autonomy under Roman rule. Rome had authority over economics, but Neapolis was able to maintain its Greek customs, language, traditions and identity (Lancaster 17-18). As a result, the city gradually became a resort city, allowing Romans an alternative to a militaristic lifestyle. The city boasted a vibrant theatre and a number of service industries (17-21).

Vacationing Romans enjoyed the *fabulae atellanae* and its portrayal of the complex nature of “rustic” Campanians. Tradition has Pulcinella’s origins in Atellan Farce, with many of the characteristics of these characters reappearing in that role, though there is no evidence linking early modern Italian performers with their ancient predecessors (Lancaster 27). It is perhaps more important that the culture of Greek theatrical enterprise was allowed to thrive even under Roman rule.

As Rome fell, Naples came briefly under the control of the Ostrogoths before its recapture by the Byzantine Empire in 536. When the Exarchate of Ravenna fell in 763, it became a Duchy, though under some measure of control by the papal suzerainty and the Byzantine Emperor. By 840, control of the Duchy of Naples became hereditary, more or less solidifying its independence.

For the most part, Naples resisted the decline experienced by other urban centers in the early middle ages. Excavation indicates near continuous habitation and manufacturing of glass, mosaics, iron and metal works, despite the insecurity of the region (Musto XXIV). The ever-present hostility of the more organized Muslims and the near-constant territorial squabbling amongst the Christian kings made for a highly unstable region in an already unstable Europe. However, Naples remained a region committed to its Greco-Roman roots, with the upper class continuing to sign documents using Greek letters until the mid-9th century (Musto XXIX). That the area appears not to have experienced the

widespread urban decline experienced by many of its neighbors is significant. A solvent population that managed to continue as a hotbed of trade, still linked to its Greek roots, may have allowed for the possibility of an unbroken cultural and theatrical tradition, albeit a mutated one.

In 1137, Naples followed the majority of the Italian peninsula in falling to the Normans, who organized the region as the Kingdom of Sicily. Under Norman rule, Naples took advantage of the hiatus in near-constant warring to expand its reputation as a hub of international trade. Existing cultures were allowed to flourish and laws were published in Arabic, Greek and Latin. The Normans imported a form of their feudal structure to the surrounding countryside, bolstering the existing elite and establishing a central royal court (Musto XLVII-XLIX).

Over the next four hundred years, Naples often changed hands. In the late 12th century, it was seized by the Holy Roman Empire after a three month siege. (Musto LI - LV). In 1266, Charles of Anjou took Naples with permission from the Pope, and executed all the heirs of the previous reign (Musto LVI). While early rule by the Anjous supported some of the early Renaissance's most famous intellectuals, including Petrarch and Boccaccio, it quickly deteriorated, and they were eventually considered generally inept, indulgent, and ruthless, and the majority of that line were assassinated (Musto LX). Contributing to the calamity

of their rule was the arrival of the Black Plague, which killed more than 50,000 people in Naples and the surrounding countryside (Lancaster 68).

By 1422, Sicily and Calabria were reunited as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ruled by the Argonese dynasty, which helped restore infrastructure that had fallen to disrepair, and established a cultural organization known as *Accademia Napoletana*.

The Argonese reign was short lived. France began to exploit some of their hereditary claims to various thrones on the Italian peninsula in a series of conflicts known as the Italian Wars. Louis VII took advantage of Neapolitan issues of succession to capture the city for himself. Spain recaptured the city in 1503, and in 1516, Hapsburg Charles V inherited all of Spain's possessions, Austria and Flanders, creating two centuries of general prosperity (Lancaster 80-88).

Noted Commedia dell'Arte author, Oliver Crick, notes that the "underdog" nature of Pulcinella as the consummate survivor is reflected in what would have been the experience of an oft-conquered people. If Pulcinella is a mutation of the characters of Maccus and Bacchus, his portrayal could represent the preservation of some element of Greek heritage among the Neapolitans despite the diversity and violence of its rule. It is significant that one of the most famous of Pulcinella's early live actor scenes paired him with the Spanish Captain, who represented the hated invader. The narratives involved Pulcinella

equaling or besting the Captain (Crick). It indicates that Pulcinella was a representative of the common Neapolitan (or, more generically, a representative of the common people enduring the political machinations of their rulers) performed for common Neapolitians.

Beginning in 1475, chroniclers began noting “Great Winters” which were colder and lasted longer alongside severe cold spurts that killed off crops and animals (Alfani 5). Glaciers in the Alps expanded every year into the Po Valley, sealing farmable land under a thick layer of ice.

Throughout the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries, the combination of bad weather and poor harvests caused a series of localized famines. These were compounded by mercenaries and foreign armies tromping over the farmland, which made planting and harvesting a complicated matter. There is an old saying that an army marches on their stomachs, and the mercenary armies of the Lombardy and Italian Wars were no exception. A letter to the Pope in 1527 from the city of Parma indicated:

All around in the countryside, up to six miles from the city, there is no bread, no wine, ... especially where our soldiers were and are billeted, no food reserves, no barrels, but everything has been burned. ... Many beasts great and small are eaten by the soldiers, who are openly robbing us. (Alfani 9)

In the wake of the wars, cities across the Italian peninsula experienced population growth. Under Spanish authority, Naples' population exploded, eventually containing a population density of approximately 7,000 people per square kilometer, which is remarkable considering this number does not exclude the enormous number of palaces, churches, public spaces and monasteries (Lancaster 90). The droves of new immigrants far surpassed the amount of available work, creating a large number of people who lived on the very edge of subsistence. These were called the *lazzaroni*, after Saint Lazarus, and they perfected the Neapolitan *arte di arrangiarsi* (art of arranging things), a delicate way of describing the near-miraculous scraping together of basic necessities. Occasional work could be earned as paid mourners at funerals, litter bearers for the wealthy, and other unskilled work.

To keep the populace from revolt, the government relied on the three "fs": *farina, focra e festini* (flour, the scaffold and festivals). The government provided some food, and eventually shifted from supplying perishable vegetables to dried pasta (*maccheroni*), which became a staple of the working poor (Lancaster 90-91).

This environment served as the crucible from which Pulcinella was forged. While the *Accademia Napoletana* created by the Argonese certainly studied the Greek and Roman texts, modern scholarship relies on vase paintings rather than text to piece together the plot and structure of the *fabulae atellanae* and *hilaro-tragodia*. While Pulcinella shares many character traits with Maccus and Bucco,

his duality and complexity root him more securely as a Commedia dell'Arte stock character in Early Modern Naples. The *Accademia Napoletana* and its northern counterparts helped usher in long form theatrics and dramatic structures.

The origins of Commedia dell'Arte are just as complicated. Some current practitioners (most notably Carlo Boso) root Commedia dell'Arte's origins in the social inversions of Medieval religious festivals, most notably Carnivale. It is, however, dubious that the three pioneering characters; Magnifico, who represented the local Doge; Zanni, who was the poor and idiotic servant; and the Courtesan, who was likely based off the socially powerful *cortigiane oneste* in Venice; were given the spotlight during religious festivals, however inverted.

It is likely that the spirit of these social inversions were carried over into the *piazas*, where Commedia took shape. It is assumed that Commedia is an artful adaptation of the *Saltimbanchi* performances of the 15th century, which were refined over time into an improvised scenario performed by stock characters familiar to their audiences. These characters were divided roughly into three main categories: the *Vecchi*, or men of money and power; the *Zanni*, who were the servants and laborers; and the lovers, who were young and wealthy.

The development of the other stock characters and their regional affiliations show the ways in which regional attributes are selected and

performed. Commedia characters taught by many modern theatre history instructors, such as Pantalone, Brighella and Arlecchino, are all names of roles made famous by individual performers, now immortalized as the names of entire families of characters. Within these stock character types there can be found widely differing interpretations of the same character type. For example, the stock character of Capitano, while always a braggart, differs in his ability and bravery from character to character. The Capitano family also includes other variations on the braggart/bully, and include Scaramuccia and Giangurgolo (both from Naples and friends of Pulcinella), Spavento, Crispin and others (Ducharte 234).

The performance of regionalism is most important to the development of Commedia dell Arte stock characters. Regional characteristics must be identifiable to other areas on the Italian peninsula while avoiding direct insult the people of the region



Figure 1: *I Balli De Spessanei*, Jacques Callot, 1622.

portrayed. The majority of the Commedia stock characters are the most comedic representation of something for which the region might have pride. It is also important that, when travelling abroad, the regionalisms are generic enough to translate to areas that have no knowledge of the region from which the character originates.

The origin of Pulcinella's name is generally attributed to *pulicenello*, or "little chick," in the Neapolitan dialect. The character has two traditional variants – the first being more dim witted (more often called Pulcinello) and the second being more bold, thieving, crafty and violent (Pulcinella) (Sand 111-112). Engravings and other extant documentation do not appear to hold to this distinction, with numerous variations on the spelling.

Pulcinella did not arrive on the Commedia stage until the early 17th century, well after Commedia dell'Arte performers had taken their shows throughout Europe. His image first appears in 1618, and Callot depicts him in one of his many engravings of Commedia dell'Arte performers in 1622 (Figure 1). By then, Pulcinella was already wearing his traditional costume of a baggy shirt, worn belted under his large belly, and trousers, the daily dress of Neapolitan peasants at the time, along with a mask with a slightly hooked nose (Speaight 12).

Even in the 17th century, numerous actors claimed to have "invented" him, including an actor named Andrea Calcese (performing as Ciuccio) and Silvio Fiorillo, who was most known for his portrayal of Capitano. Ducharte puts his birthplace in the town of Benevento, a town built on the side of a mountain, and ascribes the duality of Pulcinella to the differences between inhabitants of that city. The "upper" Pulcinella is sly, quick witted and sensual, and is related to Bucco. The "lower" Pulcinello is slow and coarse.³

Contemporary diarist G.B. Doni (d. 1647) places his origins in Salerno, a district known for a “nasal treble” (Ducharte 217). Anecdotes from the period have an unidentified Commedia troupe passing time in Acerra during the grape harvest and falling to drink with the local peasants. Eventually, they got to arguing with the Acerrans, exchanging insults and eventually blows. Later, the troupe remembered how clever Puccio D’Aniello, one of the local peasants, insults had been and returned to invite him to join the company. He did, and took the stage in the garb traditional of his region, representing the laboring people of Naples (Ducharte 217).

Unlike most of the Commedia stock characters, Pulcinella was so embraced by the South of Italy that he has enjoyed a long, unbroken tradition of performance in and around Naples, and has continued to evolve and adapt within his region of origin as a representative of Neapolitan laborers. Second generation Pulcinella performer and maestro Antonio Fava insists that he cannot be performed in another language without adapting the character, so ingrained is the character in his place of birth (Rudlin 139). Fava and the many other modern Pulcinellas use the stock character in a number of performances that demonstrate the Neapolitan diaspora. “The stranger is converted into a national type to be the mouthpiece of all that is unique and untranslatable in the humor of a race” (Lee 102).

The physical performance of Pulcinella includes a jerky quickness of step balanced with slow and deliberate gesture. In temperament, he is played as either stupid feigning clever or clever feigning stupid, but at all counts his good nature conceals a particular brand of fatalism that tends toward the brutal. He does not bother with finesse and his jokes tend toward the crass. He is not prone to boasting, cannot keep a secret, delights in food and wine, and loves picking fights. He is generally incapable of expressing or understanding human kindness, and as a result tends toward the lonely, even when he has a domestic partner (which he often does, uncharacteristically for Commedia stock characters) (Rudlin 141). He is probably best described as a mule – tethered generally to the soil, considered by many to be stubborn, stupid and obstinate, but in all cases he is completely capable of his own survival.

In contrast to the other *zanni*, Pulcinella displays the sort of frankness and fatalism one would expect from a culture that makes an art form of scraping by. The Neapolitan *arte di arrangiarsi* lends itself to survival by any means, a sentiment echoed in Pulcinella's traits. What he wants, he takes, and he makes no apologies. Rather, he delights in the subversion.

Punch is a total hedonist; he only wants his personal pleasure.

Anything else is an annoyance, an interference, and must be eliminated. This innocence, ever-present yet undeclared, is what

binds him to his southern Italian origins, in a South where even the worst is never unquestionably guilty. (Fava)

By contrast, Arlecchino, though perpetually hungry and in over his head, never fully grasps the consequences of his actions, and if things turn out well in the end, it is almost invariably due to luck rather than cleverness. Even the clubs they both carry are symbolically different. Arlecchino carries the club (*batocchio*) used by others to beat him, but never wields it himself with violence. Pulcinella, on the other hand, uses his club to “cancel debts,” asserting the potential of violence as a tool of subversion for the monied classes. It is no surprise that Pulcinella never became a favorite of the elite in any of his variants. His unapologetic subversion of order represented a very dangerous sort of personal liberty.

By the turn of the 17th Century, Commedia troupes had been documented as performing all over Europe, either making the treacherous passage over the Alps or travelling by ship. These companies generally had at least ten performers: two *vecchi*, two pairs of lovers, two *zanni*, a Capitano and a *servetta*. When I Gelosi made the trip to France to perform for King Henri III, the caravan headed north out of Italy was massive, including the sets, costumes and machinery for several



Figure 2: From Dr. Anton van Bourgoingne, *Ghebreken der Tonghe*, Antwerp 1632.

performances. They crossed the Alps in the dead of winter and recuperated in Lyons only to be kidnapped and held ransom by the Huguenots (Rudlin and Crick 20-21).

Puppetry had long been a popular theatrical form on the Southern Italian peninsula, with marionette puppetry performed throughout ancient Greece. The *Opera dei Pupi* (Opera of the Puppets), a Sicilian traditional puppet form developed some time during the 13th Century, blended the Sicilian *cantastori* (essentially troubadors) and folk tales. These performances were traditionally held on a decorated donkey cart and performed with marionettes.

As Commedia actors began accumulating fame and fortune in their performances, the narratives and characters were adopted by puppeteers who were able to travel more nimbly and with much less expense. Contemporaries remarked at the nimbleness of Italian marionette puppetry at the time, which were able to “fight, hunt, dance, play at dice, blow the trumpet and perform most artistically the part of cook” (Speaight 17). According to engravings, performances were often a combination of live performers who sang, danced and capered on a small platform, and marionettes or glove puppets. These performers followed the live Commedia troupes out of Italy (See Figure 2).

Many scholars, including Speaight and Crick, attribute the variable nature of Pulcinella to the ways in which he was performed. The same character, portrayed by live actors, marionettes and glove puppets, will develop different

characteristics based on the limitations of their medium. Live action violence is often tricky to make look convincing, but can look particularly violent when enacted by puppets. The strings prevent marionettes from engaging in sword play, but that can be averted by making Pulcinella a coward. Glove puppets, however, excel in violence and can wield weapons with ease.

By 1600, Francatrippa, a *zanni* similar to Arlecchino, had shown up in French language puppetry. Almost as soon as Pulcinella was developed by Commedia actors, he arrived on puppet stages in France, where he was “received like a noble citizen in Paris” (Speaight 21). Pulcinella’s transformation outside of his homeland had begun.

3. EVOLUTION: PULCINELLA IN ENGLAND

By the early 17th Century, Italian Commedia troupes had a significant history of performance in England. As early as 1550, the Privy Council notes payment to a company of Italian players. On January 13, 1577, the Privy Council ordered the Mayor of London to allow a commedia troupe (run by Drusiano) perform within the city limits until Lent. Commentary was not always favorable, in part due to the inclusion of women on the stage. Thomas Nashe, a poet and playwright, described the “players beyond the sea” as “a sort of squirting boudie comedians that have whores to play womens’ parts and forebeare no immodest speech or unchast action that may procure laughter”⁴ (Smith 175-177). References to Commedia characters pepper the plays of both Shakespeare and Jonson, indicating that their audiences were familiar enough with “old Pantaloon” and the “zanies,” as the English called the *zanni*, to be mentioned casually.⁵

Nashe’s derision, combined with the inclusion of references in popular English theatre, illuminate the ways in which the discussion of morality was shaping English popular entertainment. Pulcinella’s arrival and development in England is inextricably linked with the ways in which the English live actor theatre developed its response to issues of morality and censorship from the people in power. Throughout, puppetry remained predominantly outside of the purview of restriction, and often flourished in times of censorship. As a character

representative of the urban poor, Pulcinella's adoption by the English occurred as the character of the English social structure changed.

By the 16th century, two Englands had more or less appeared – an open-field, village-centered pastoral England, and the areas linked to larger towns or cities, relying on an expanding market economy. The English population had increased by 45% between 1545 and 1600, driving down labor prices, creating food and land shortages, and causing migration in search of work. This population expansion put increasing onus on the arable lands, creating a need for capitalist agriculture, which in turn drove enclosures (Underdown 18). This consolidation of holdings lead to a consolidation of power in the rural areas, contributing to a rise of the gentry (20-21).

Jeramiads increasingly included the growing number of “masterless persons,” as English society was more or less held together by the concept of households with individuals under the control of a husband, father or master. Beginning in about 1580, Southampton was particularly concerned about a number of “young women and maidens which keep themselves out of service and work for themselves in divers men's houses,” and who “take chambers and so live by themselves masterless” (Underdown 36-37).

Across England, towns and villages celebrated communally around various feast days, including St. George's Day, the Feast of Fools, May Day and other midsummer processions. Village churches derived funding for restorations

and improvements from fêtes known as Church Ales. As the population grew and poverty deepened, Protestants blamed popular festivals for lawlessness and immorality, associating mystery plays, saints' days, the Feast of Fools and midsummer festivals with pagan superstition and popery. A number of saints day celebrations were banned throughout the 1540s, and an Act passed in 1541 prohibited anyone below yeoman status access to "tables, tennis, dice, cards and bowls," and other "immoral" games (Underdown 47).

As economic conditions worsened in the 1590s, Parliament responded with a series of bills regulating alehouses and Sabbath observance in an attempt to impose moral order on the disorderly poor. Throughout the final decade of the 16th century, towns banned Church Ales. In 1616, towns were paying travelling performance companies to leave without performing. By 1620, official arguments for refusal of the performances included their effect on the morals of the lower classes, so much so that clever performers included a provision to hire an officer whose sole purpose was to prevent entry by "poor people, servants and idle persons" (Underdown 50). By 1625, morality-related prosecutions dramatically outnumbered criminal cases in Essex (Underdown 48-51).

It should not be construed that the members of the "lower order" took the gradual removal of their traditional celebrations and access to entertainment lying down. There are a number of instances of the general rabble protesting the shift from the Church Ales to an assize, and the sheer number of arrests based on

perceived moral shortcomings indicates resistance. In June of 1618, the people of Weymouth marched their maypole through town with a procession of drums and trumpets, defying the mayor's orders. Charges for the large number of individuals prosecuted for the spectacle included drunkenness, assaulting the constables, and "upbraiding and contemptuous speeches" (Underdown 56).

At the top of the social hierarchy, King Charles I was wrestling for absolute rule as Parliament tied his purse strings to their involvement in the management of the country. Charles had earned the distrust of Parliament and Puritans by marrying a French Catholic, Henrietta Maria of France. Their trepidation seemed confirmed when Charles expressed an interest in a developing sect of the Anglican Church known as Arminianism, which emphasized salvation through good works and church ritual and supported the Divine Right of Kings. In 1637, Charles imposed a revised English Book of Common Prayer on Scotland, prompting a series of open conflict known as the Bishops' Wars and further indebting Charles to Parliament. Taking advantage of the crown's vulnerability, the Irish Catholics rebelled four years later, primarily in the northern province of Ulster, prompting widespread and bloody massacres on English Protestants that winter (University of Cambridge).

The political power struggle taking place between Parliament and Charles I was a topic of satire on the public stages. In May 1639, *The Cardinal's Conspiracie*, a play that satirized church hierarchy and ritual, was performed,

prompting the arrest of the actors. Other short plays satirizing the church followed, including *Canterbury and His Change of Diot*, *The Bishops Potion* and *Lambeth Fair*, along with several others.

On September 2, 1642, the following order was issued, closing playhouses around the country:

Whereas the distress and Estate of Ireland, steeped in her own Blood, and the distracted Estate of England, threatened with a Cloud of Blood by a Civill War, call for all possible Means to appease and avert the Wrath of God, appearing in these Judgments; among which, Fasting and Prayer have been tried to be very effectual ... and are still enjoyed; and whereas Publike Sports do not well agree with Publike Calamities, nor Publike Stage-Playes with the Seasons of Humiliation, this being an Exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of Pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth, and Levitie it is therefore thought fit, and Ordained, by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament Assembled, that while these sad Causes and set times of Humiliation doe continue, publike Stage-playes shall cease and be forborne, instead of which are recommended to the People of this land the profitable and seasonable considerations of Repentance, Reconciliation and Peace with God, which probably may produce outward Peace and

Prosperity, and bring again Times of Joy and Gladness to these Nations. (Wiseman 1)

While the sentiment of this text appears to indicate a cancelation of theatrical enterprise in favor of prayer as a desperate measure to dampen widespread conflict, orders passed by the House of Lords in 1647 indicate that this document is part of a long-term campaign against theatres. In October of 1647, sheriffs in Westminster, London, Surrey and Middlesex were given authorization to arrest anyone who has “acted or played in such Playhouses or Places abovesaid” (Wiseman 2). As chronicled in Susan Wiseman’s *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War*, the series of Orders issued throughout the Civil War and the Commonwealth indicate a pattern of strictures against the stage in response to periods of political crisis. Based on extant records, it becomes clear that theatrical presentations had become, if not in actuality then at least in the eyes of those in authority, a recognized tool in the shaping of popular discourse.

Puppet shows, known as “motions,” remained popular throughout the Civil War and, considered less of a nuisance than satirical theatre, were allowed to continue unhindered. The pamphlet *The Actors’ Remonstrance or Complaint for the Silencing of their Profession*, published in 1643, includes a complaint that:

puppet plays, which are not so valuable as the very music between each act at ours, are still kept up with uncontrolled allowance... wither citizens of all parts repair, with far more detriment to

themselves than ever did the plays, comedies and tragedies [at our theatres]. (Speaight 37)

Throughout the Civil War and ensuing Commonwealth, puppetry⁶ was the only legal form of entertainment for the majority of the populace. John Styles believes it is possible that an Italian named Pietro Cotelli may have brought an Italian marionette show starring Pulcinella in 1643, though the document to which he sources this assumption has been questioned by other scholars (Byrom 87-88).

Having long been a performance genre with little status, the English puppeteers were, perhaps, not prepared to become the sole purveyors of popular entertainment (and, to some extent, preservers of theatrical tradition). Contemporary documents indicate that the performances were not very good, the puppets were of poor construction, and the puppeteers were often unintelligible. One writer pleaded that “such fools-baubles as puppet plays” be banned and the stage productions restored (Speaight 38).

It is then somewhat a surprise that, after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, a puppet show would become a cosmopolitan event. In 1662, noted diarist and member of Parliament, Samuel Pepys, commented on a puppet play he had seen in Covent Garden, which he enjoyed so much he returned two weeks later with his wife after their visit to the opera. He described the event as “an Italian puppet play that is within the rails there, which is very pretty, the best I ever

saw, and a great resort of gallants” (Speaight 39). The puppet show was performed for Charles II at Whitehall in October of that year, and the King so enjoyed the performance that the puppeteer, an Italian performing as Signor Bologna, alias Pollicinella, was given a fine gold chain and medal as a token of appreciation (39).

Bologna, whose real name was Pietro Gimonde, had been performing Commedia dell’Arte scenarios with puppets across Europe, with records of him performing in Munich in 1656, Frankfurt and Cologne in 1657, and Vienna in 1658. His performance in London was so successful, six additional puppet shows followed his lead. In November, another Italian puppet show appeared in Charing Cross, noted by Pepys as having better puppets but less skill in puppetry and narrative. Another “Polichinello” puppet show appeared in Moorfields four years later. In 1667, Pepys reported that, after seeing a play at the King’s playhouse, he and his friends went “to Polichinello, and there had three times more sport than at the play” (Speaight 40-41).

By 1673, itinerant English puppeteers had capitalized on the popularity of the “Punchinella” performances and were performing throughout the countryside. Diary entries in London and complaints from town councils indicate that these performances were attended by both the genteel and the “meaner sort of people” diverted “from their labour in the manufacturies” (Speaight 43). It is unclear whether or not performances were given in English or



Figure 3: *The Cryes of the City of London Drawne After Life, "Merry Andrew" 1688.*
© British Museum.

Italian, but even English puppeteers made use of an "interpreter." A contemporary engraving of "Merry Andrew," (Figure 3) a popular itinerant English puppeteer, shows him with a hunched back and pot belly similar to Pulcinella's.

Performances were also accompanied by music, with records of dulcimers and violins played. The majority of these performances likely used marionettes, a shift from the glove

puppets that were most common prior to the Civil War. The Italian puppet booths were also notable for their special scenery, rigged to allow quick changes between elaborate backdrops (Speaight 46).

By the Revolution in 1688, the English had adopted the name of Punch for the little puppet, known for his shortness and fatness, but not for a temper. As the Italians moved on in their trans-European travels the English adaptations of the style increasingly became the fare of the common people. In 1699, satirist Ned Ward described a May Fair performance of Punch, performing opposite the Devil (introduced in more traditional English puppet theatre a century before) for "a number of lazy, lousy-looking rascals, and so hateful a throng of beggarly, sluttish strumpets" (Speaight 47).

A scholar at Oxford, Joseph Addison, wrote a poem on the workings of the popular puppet shows titled "Machinae Gesticulantes," (1698) in the style of the great Latin epics. The poem articulates the theatrical elements employed by the puppeteers of the time. A "Merry Andrew," or clown, would draw an audience, which was charged different prices for different seats. The booth made use of a curtain, painted scenery, and a fine mesh that obscured the view of the marionette wires. Punch was larger than the other puppets in the show, with eyes that rolled (a feature of old Roman puppets), a large belly and a hunch back. By then, the nasal, nearly unintelligible voice, often produced by an instrument known as a swazzle, was standard (Speaight 49).

By the turn of the century, the ribaldry characteristic of English Restoration Comedy had begun to strike a sour chord with several of the gentry. The liberties taken by performers, particularly in their scorn for the clergy, had given the lingering opponents of the theatre a solid grievance. A series of tracts were circulated discussing the licenses taken by the acting companies, including Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), an anonymous document called *A Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the English Stage* (1704), and Arthur Bedford's *The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays* (1706). A pair of anonymous tracts published together in 1704 details a number of performers successfully prosecuted for blasphemy on stage,

followed by an itemization of egregious references to heaven, hell, God, the devil, and calling a pox down on someone (Anonymous).

In 1714, Parliament passed the Vagrancy Law, which lumped “fencers, bear-wards, common-players of interludes, minstrels, [and] jugglers” with snake-oil salesmen, gypsies, fortune tellers and men who leave their families. All were branded “rogues and vagrants,” and they were to be arrested and tried (Great Britain).

In 1726, William Law wrote a 59-page treaty titled *The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage-entertainment Fully Demonstrated*. The document establishes it the actors’ purpose to:

entertain you with all manner of *Ribaldry, Prophaneness* [sic], *Rand* and *Impurity* of Discourse; who are to present you with *vile* thoughts and lewd Imaginations, in *fine Language*, and to make *wicked, vain* and *impure discourse* more lively and affecting that you could possibly have it in any ill Company. (6)

He cautions women of virtue against attending performances among the “*rakes and ill women... for such persons* to be delighted with such Entertainments, is as natural, as for any *Animal* to delight in its proper *Element*” (emphasis his) (7).

In response to the various tracts, elements decried as morally questionable were removed. Producers instead took the opportunity to explore a theatrical style that mixed contemporary politics with Italian opera and sentimental drama, known as a burlesque. In the early 18th century, the burlesques had been categorized as either “high burlesques” like those written by renowned wit Alexander Pope, which included literary parodies and mock-heroic epics; or “low burlesques,” which treated serious subject matter irreverently. Both incorporated scathing political satire.

Most famously, playwrights John Gay and Henry Fielding took particular delight in antagonizing Sir Robert Walpole, the head of the King’s Cabinet (often considered to be England’s first Prime Minister). Fielding’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) insinuated a similarity between Walpole and Jonathan Wild, a local who had recently been uncovered as having operated both as thief-catcher and head of a complex and talented network of thieves. Walpole protested, and Fielding, inspired or emboldened by the publicity surrounding the performance, escalated the satire.

Fielding’s work was performed in the Haymarket Theatre that showed coarser fare than the patent houses, including stilt walking, slack-rope walkers and French comedians. Their reputation was made somewhat better by the adoption of the leading actors from Drury Lane in 1733, who were in the midst of a contract dispute with their managers. In 1736, Fielding achieved significant

financial success with *Pasquin*, which had more than forty performances. The play was unflinching in its lambasting of political corruption and bribery (Nettleton 206-208).

Members of the Parliament had already grown weary of such nightly mockeries. In March of 1735, Sir John Barnard introduced the topic of censorship of the theatres, and though the bill was not passed, discussion had begun. In 1737, a play called *The Golden Rump* (often attributed to Fielding but suggested by some historians to have been commissioned by Walpole himself), no complete copy of which survives, made it to the hands of Walpole, who read lurid excerpts to a horrified Parliament as an example of the scandalous nature of contemporary performances (Shevelow 244). They moved swiftly to pass the Licensing Act, which expanded the branding of roguery and vagabond status to “any person involved in performing plays for money, except by the authority of a Royal patent or a license from the Lord Chamberlain,” and required that a “true copy” of all “play, entertainments, prologues and epilogues” be submitted two weeks prior to performance for approval (Licensing Act).

It should be noted that closet dramas, or dramas that were only intended to be read and not performed, were not censored. Neither were pamphlets or other printed works, though authors could later be tried for libel or slander. The censorship of words was strictly limited to that which was spoken (Worrall 35). The only form to be presented on a stage not subject to censorship were the

Burlettas, which were programs in which all dialogue was sung, much like the modern opera, and puppet shows.

As a result of these restrictions, a number of former stage actors, including Fielding himself, took up puppetry as an alternative means of producing their performances. Pioneering the movement from live performers to “motions” was Charlotte Charke, a popular stage actress noted for dressing in men’s clothing, who opened a marionette theatre in an old tennis court on James Street around the corner from the Little Haymarket. Her performances cast Punch in popular productions, including Shakespeare and some of Fielding’s less controversial works. Her theatre was licensed as a puppet theatre, a license which assumed the performances would center around traditional puppet fare and was therefore not subject to censorship. In April of 1738, Charke produced an all-Fielding evening, performing Fielding’s condemned *The Mock Doctor* and *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* with Punch performing the main roles (Shevelow 262-265).

Based on her success, Fielding eventually opened his own puppet theatre in 1748, and Samuel Foote followed suit by opening his Primitive Puppet Show in 1773, which specialized in burlesquing the popular Sentimental Comedies with Punch (sans squeaker) included (Speaight 59). Urban puppet shows, particularly in London’s West End, had taken on significantly more wit, polish and sophistication than their predecessors. Temporarily, Punch, symbol of the

working classes, had become a tool of the urban intelligentsia as a symbol of subversion, a hand sized Lord of Misrule.

Significantly, in the rural faires, Punch's character was undergoing an evolution that underscored the growing differences between rural and urban labor populations. Throughout the century, Punch was cast as something of a weak figure for the amusement of rural people. In 1786, noted Italian-born English literary critic Guiseppe Baretti described Punch as a "timid and weak fellow [who is] always thrashed by the other puppet-actors in the show; yet always boasts of victory after they are gone, as feeble cowards are apt to do, bragging that they have gotten the better of those by whom they were soundly bastinadoed" (Speaight 66). Joan, his wife, became increasingly violent throughout the century. The following, an excerpt from Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730), demonstrates just how terrifying she could be:

PUNCH. Joan, Joan, Joan, has a thundering tongue,

And Joan, Joan, Joan is a bold one.

How happy is he,

Who from wedlock is free;

For who'd have a wife to scold one?

JOAN. Punch, Punch, Punch, prythee think of your hunch,

Prythee look at your great strutting belly;

Sirrah, if you dare

War with me [to] declare,
I will beat your fat guts to a jelly. (66)

After nearly a century at the hands of the urban upper class and rural laborers, a character who was born in Naples as a symbol of the working man's strength had become increasingly emasculated. By mid-century, most puppet shows ended with a thoroughly beaten Punch being whisked off to hell by the Devil. As one would expect from a character representing a class of people, the way in which Punch was performed was subtly but informatively changed by the individuals in control of the performance, but that did not necessarily mean that Punch's altered character remained popular at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. It is likely significant that, by the end of the 18th century, the marionette shows that were so popular at the various fairs had dwindled. Bartholomew Fair boasted 11 such puppet shows in 1792. By 1805, there were no puppet shows performing.

While these elaborate marionette shows were diminishing at the fairs, booth shows were gaining in popularity in urban areas, particularly those frequented by urban laborers. By 1785, popular engravings include street-side glove puppet booths. The dramatic change from elaborate marionette stage, complete with meticulously detailed sets and machinations, to the simple hand puppet booth was an economic one. Marionette stages, while requiring significantly fewer individuals than a live actor performance troupe, still

required four or five people to effectively manipulate, were complicated to set up and tear down, and required significant training to perform with any skill. A glove puppet theatre can be carried on one's back, set up and torn down quickly, and requires only one individual to operate.

George Speaight, noted Punch and puppetry scholar, describes the rapid evolution of what we now recognize as a "Punch and Judy" show as a function of adaptation to the constraints of glove puppetry (78). Punch's violent tendencies, he asserts, are borne of the necessity to rapidly end scenes. Moreover, he claims that Punch's stick is only included because glove puppets are capable of wielding small sticks. Punch, he asserts, is the arch-type of "he who gets slapped" (79).

While Speaight's research into the history of English puppetry is admirable, it is clear that his research, like many histories of the theatre, was isolated from the turbulent socio-political environment in which Punch's transition took place. The origin of Punch's club seems to be evident in his predecessor Pulcinella's perpetual club wielding. The perpetual cross-pollination of Italian genre theatre, including operetta and related musical forms, would have provided continual reinforcement of the Commedia-based stock characters. Rather than credit Punch's return to violence on simplicity of staging, it seems evident that Punch carried a club because he has always carried a club. It seems that it is more valuable to determine why Punch was, for a time, neutered on the

English puppet stage. As a representative of the common urban worker on the English stage, changes to the ways in which common urban workers are treated by people in positions of authority and the ways in which they perceive themselves become crucial to his evolution.

Between the Restoration in 1660 and the Death of King George III in 1820, 190 crimes against property were converted to capital crimes, sixty of which were passed between 1760 and 1810 (Thompson 60-61). These included everything from petty theft to destroying enclosure fences or acts of industrial sabotage. Punch would have belonged to the classes such measures were meant to control.

In the very towns in which Punch was evolving as a glove puppet, the working poor began to riot. Throughout the late 18th century, a series of bread or food rights demonstrated the gradual shift from an “unruly mob” to what Dr. George Rudé, author of *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, calls the “revolutionary crowd.” Food-related riots in Nottingham, including the “Great Cheese Riot” in 1764 and the meat riot of 1788 are typical of many of these food riots in that, while food was looted, there was also evidence of punishment of the purveyors themselves as shops were destroyed. In Honiton in 1766, corn was seized from the farmers and sold in the markets by hungry lace workers, only to have the profits and corn sacks returned to the farmers. These “riots” were less

unruly mobs than ordered acts of rebellion against price fixing (Thompson 63-65).

But food riots were only a small part of the complex social upheaval taking place in England. E.P. Thompson's excellent and thorough study, *The Making of the English Working Class*, presents a complex nexus of internal and external ideas fomenting political upheaval in its earliest stirrings, particularly amongst the literate skilled tradespeople. At its heart was the notion of the Free-born Englishman, a notion summarized in an *Address* delivered by the London Corresponding Society in 1793, comparing the English and French commoners: "our persons were protected by the laws, while their lives were at the mercy of every titled individual ... We were MEN while they were SLAVES" (83). The rights of commoners were secured, not by constitution, but through precedent based in Saxon law. These laws established the supremacy of hereditary monarchies, rights of landowners and the established church, and the triumph of property rights over human rights.

As the Industrial Revolution burgeoned in England, the class system shifted. Thousands flocked from agricultural areas to mines and factories, stripping individuals of the relative autonomy and variety of agricultural work to tedious and often dangerous industrial labor. Small villages that characterized rural areas were increasingly replaced with cities born of industry, which were often festering with slapdash and unsanitary tenements.

By 1844, conditions in industrial cities were so bad that they prompted the development of the Health and Towns Commission. Its first report surveyed the sewer conditions (at that time, an open channel rather than a buried line for wastewater) and access to clean drinking water for the communities. The report indicates that, in poor districts in the industrial towns of Bradford, Bury, Liverpool, and Manchester, the poor were often charged or forced to beg for access to clean water, and fetid water lay stagnant in the streets. The worst parts of Manchester were described thusly:

A hoard of ragged women and children swarm about, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles... The race that lives in these ruinous cottages behind broken windows mended with oilskin, sprung doors and rotten door-posts, or in dark wet cellars in measureless filth and stench... must really have reached the lowest stage of humanity... In each of these pens, containing at most two rooms, a garret and perhaps a cellar, on the average, twenty human beings live. For each 120 persons, one usually inaccessible privy is provided. (Hopkins 22)

Between 1765 and 1799, tavern gossip surely included discussion of plebian revolutions taking place – first in America, and then, more violently, in France. In 1790, statesman, satirist and political theorist Edmund Burke published a best-selling pamphlet discussing his opinion of the French

Revolution. In it, he lambasts the Revolution for its abstract foundations, which ignored the potential darkness of human nature. In it, he pointed out the function of clergy and nobility in nurturing learning. He cautioned that the rise of the populace might be its downfall. "Along with its natural protectors and guardians," he wrote, "learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of the swinish multitude" (Burke).

It is unsurprising that the "multitude" resented their comparison to hogs. A flood of angry, pork-themed pamphlets were published in answer to Burke's tract. *Address to the Hon. Edmund Burke from the Swinish Multitude*, published in 1793, answers him thusly: "Whilst ye are ... gorging yourselves at troughs filled with the daintiest wash; we, with our numerous train of *porkers*, are employed, from the rising to the setting sun, to obtain the means of subsistence, by... picking up a few acorns" (Thompson 90).

Among the counter-arguments was Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791), which, among other things, articulated a number of social elements including a graduated income tax, funds for education, old age pensions, and funeral, maternity and marriage benefits.

By the operation of this plan, the poor laws, those instruments of civil torture, will be superceded ... The dying poor will not be dragged from place to place to breathe their last, as a reprisal of parish upon parish. Widows will have a maintenance for their

children... and children will no longer be considered as increasing the distresses of their parents... The number of petty crimes, the offspring of distress and poverty, will be lessened. The poor, as well as the rich, will then be interested in the support of Government, and the cause and apprehension of riots and tumults will cease. Ye who sit in ease, and solace yourselves in plenty ... have ye thought of these things? (Thompson 93-94)

Unlike many of the previous Jacobin pamphlets, which focused on high-minded politics that had no place in subsistence-based living, Paine's pamphlet spoke directly to the daily hardships of the urban working poor. Twenty thousand copies were sold, and more were distributed directly to areas where working men were concentrated – into mines and coal pits and in villages surrounding industrial areas (Thompson 108). It was not the discussion of external affairs that riled the English commoners, but rather a pamphlet that asserted general rights that would alleviate the daily worry of subsistence living (104).

By the autumn of 1792, nobles throughout the English countryside noted agitation. The "lower people" in Durham were described as marking "No King," "Liberty" and "Equality" in the Market Cross. Protesting ship workers suggested the local general read Paine's work, and commented on their desire to divide his estate for themselves (103).

It is amidst this powder-keg that Punch undergoes his transformation from the henpecked marionette of the rural summer Faire to the violent glove puppet of the urban booth. This transition is particularly significant because, for a time, the narrative and character of Punch were in the hands of working class performers for working class audiences. It is in this part of his development that the “standard” tropes of the Punch and Judy show were solidified.

By 1818, Punch’s wife’s name changed from Joan to Judy. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Joan was a popular name amongst the peasant classes, and was often used as a synonym for domestic help (Speaight 85). As a marionette, Joan gleefully abused her husband, verbally and physically. Over time, Punch began to hit her back. In 1828, John Payne Collier published a Punch and Judy script during which Punch praises Joan for her beauty and asks for a kiss. She responds by slapping him across the face. “Take it then,” she replies, “How do you like my kisses? Will you have another?” (103)

As Joan transitioned into Judy, her temperament softened and Punch began to strike the first blow. In 19th century slang, a “Judy” was a prostitute. While modern audiences view the treatment of Judy as cruel, early audiences would have seen her beating and frequent death as a cathartic punishment for her perpetual emasculation of Punch. Moreover, associating her with prostitution placed her lower than Punch on a social ladder.

Also added in the 19th century is the inclusion of the *lazzo* of the baby. Judy fetches the baby for Punch and then is called off on some duty. The baby begins to cry, and Punch is incapable of silencing it. Frustrated, Punch tosses the baby out the window. As most, if not all, of the audience members lived in tenements, surely the notion of tossing a wailing baby out a window was a cathartic experience. Once it was included, the trio of Punch, Judy, and the Baby (which is always tossed or kicked out the window) became the cornerstone of the narratives.

The character of the Beadle, a minor church official whose role is to maintain order in church services, had been introduced a century before, a requirement as Punch became ever more violent. Over time, he was replaced by the Constable or Policeman, especially after Sir Robert Peel organized the first Metropolitan Police Act in 1829, the primary goal of which was to prevent rather than detect crime, often to the public's chagrin (Metropolitan Police). Comedic business often involved Punch evading a slew of law enforcement before finally getting caught and the lengthy recitation of the officer's duties or the laws broken by Punch (often including a number of outrageously petty misdemeanors).

With the help of the Constable, Punch inevitably found his way to the hangman, usually named Jack Ketch after an executioner employed by King Charles II, who was notorious for a series of botched executions that required a

number of blows to actually accomplish two high profile beheadings. During the 18th Century, Punch was often executed by Jack Ketch, and was described in Robert Southey's play *Jane Shore* as a "martyr to humanity." By the early 19th Century, Punch was regularly turning the tables on the Hangman, tricking Jack Ketch into putting his own neck into the noose. As the socio-political situation became increasingly tense, Punch needed confrontation with the law, and his interaction with the Constable and Hangman as representatives of state and tools of social control echoed the interactions with those in positions of power and those who continued to be disenfranchised.



Figure 4: *Punch hangs Jack Ketch*, by George Cruikshank, 1827.

The shift towards the Hangman's subversion may relate to the culture of public hangings, which occurred outside London's Newgate Prison until 1868. Hanging offenses under the "Bloody Code," the penal code in place from 1791-1892, included poaching, writing a threatening letter, pick pocketing, being out at night with a blackened face, begging without a license, and "strong evidence of malice" in children aged seven to fourteen (British Library). Some records for the period indicate that trials could be as short as a few minutes, with no time for the condemned to plead their case. Other

documents indicate that judges and juries were hesitant to submit guilty verdicts in capital cases, unwilling to condemn someone to death for petty theft.

Despite the large number of capital offenses, only about 200 executions took place each year. Punch's hanging of Jack Ketch, a representative of the brutality of execution, seems a poignant reversal in a period where desperate poverty was both rampant and condemned, especially when coupled with egalitarian literature like *Rights of Man*.



Figure 5: *Punch bests the Devil*, by George Cruikshank, 1827.

Interestingly, Punch's ability to subvert the justice system extended into the realm of the spiritual. The appearance of the Devil, a traditional holdover from medieval motions, served as the finale in 17th and 18th century versions of the performance, with poor Punch being led off to hell for his numerous crimes. As early as 1765, Samuel Johnson noted that "in rustic puppet plays I have seen the Devil very lustily belabored by Punch" (Speiaght 88). Poet Edward Popham wrote in his *Pupae Gesticulantes* (1774):

But now there interrupts the scene one fitted for vengeance. See, the instrument of punishment, the Devil, stands forth, horrid in shape, deformed, monstrous and black. Nearer he approaches with

tremendous shrieks, and as he stretches out his muscular arms, the battle begins. The Hero [Punch] wages his more than human struggle with unequal strength; the fierce din of their contest is heard by his wife, a woman worthy of her husband in every feature... She promptly joins his side, for (wonderfully) she loves him. The enemy is attacked with nails, hands and feet; he rushes at each adversary in turn as from either side they belabor him with alternate blows. Suddenly, however, he flees from this double embrace and, thinly shrieking, vanishes into the air.

In 1827, Collier described “a showman, on one occasion, not merely receiving little or no money, but getting lamentably pelted with mud, because, from some scruple or another, he refused to allow the victory over the Devil to Punch” (47).

The subversion of the devil, despite Punch’s obvious transgressions, reflects the turbulent relationship the English working classes had with religion. Often, the working class found solace in the Old Testament, in which they found

allegories of their plights.

The plight of the puppeteers further solidifies Punch as a product of the



Figure 6: *On the Road to Derby -- The Punch & Judy Man*, by E.F. Brewtnall, 1870, for the *Illustrated London News*. ©The Victoria and Albert Museum

working class. Giovanni Piccini, an early 19th Century's Punch and Judy puppeteer, was made famous by sitting for Cruickshank's drawings in 1827. The book, a combination of drawings and a "script" cobbled together by John Payne Collier from both a live and remembered performance some thirty years previous, was popular enough to earn a number of reprints.

By the time Collier interviewed Piccini in 1827, he was eighty two years old, living in a low public house called the King's Arms off Drury Lane, where he had been a fixture.

I never had a more amusing morning, for Piccini himself was a strange character; the dirt, darkness and uncouthness of his abode, together with the forbiddingness of Mrs P., I shall never forget. She was an Irishwoman and he an Italian, and the jumble of language in their discourse was in itself highly entertaining. (Speiaght 94)

Piccini's successor, an anonymous fellow interviewed later by Henry Mayhew for *London Labor and the London Poor*, published in its entirety in 1851, explained that Piccini had sold both his booth and puppets for thirty five shillings before dying in St. Giles' Workhouse in 1835. The puppeteer described to Mayhew a performance undergoing another transformation. "Twenty years ago, I have often got eight shillings for one hexhibition [sic] in the streets, and many times I'd perform eight or ten times a day. ... Arter performing in the streets of a day we used to attend private partings in the hevening" (Mayhew).

It is these private performances that increasingly became a primary source of income, often for the burgeoning middle class that hired Punch and Judy shows for family entertainment over the holidays.

The prison scene and the baby is what we call the sentimental touches. Some folks where I preforms will have it most sentimental, in the original style. Them families is generally sentimental themselves. To these sentimental folks I'm obliged to preform steady and werry slow; they won't have no ghost, no coffin and no devil; and that's what I call spiling the performance entirely," described the showman to Mayhew. "Other folks is all for the comic, specially the street people; and then we has to dwell on the bell scene, and the nursing the baby, and the frying pan, and the sausages, and the Jim Crow. (Mayhew 54)

By the 1860s, boy's books began to include instructions on how to create Punch and Judy shows at home. In 1879, Hamley's toy shop was selling figures for five guineas per set. Punch and Judy puppeteers found their way to the beachside communities such as Blackpool which were popular for working class people who were able to afford a short holiday by the shore. Punch became synonymous with the boardwalk, and his predominantly laboring adult audiences were gradually supplanted by middle class children. By the end of the

19th century, he was permanently associated with children's shows, a situation echoed in America.

Though Punch had been rendered generally harmless in performance by his wholesale adoption into the nurseries of the growing English middle class, some element of his anarchistic, rebellious spirit remained. As the moral expectations of the middle class became more rigid, Punch represented freedom from social constraints. Speaking in a BBC radio program in 2000, Ben Wilson remarked that, in the 1820s, "older people looked back at Punch as a time when you could do what you wanted before the moral police came along (Reeves, *Mr. Punch Says*)." He represented a folk memory of frankness that was being increasingly stifled by Victorian prudishness as the *petite-bourgeois* developed out of the lower classes.

It was a sense of nostalgia that prompted early Victorian middle- and upper- class men to invite Punch into their homes. They had found immense joy in the show during their youth as young 'men about town,' seeing in the puppet a reflection of the pleasurable elements of Regency culture, including hedonism and misogyny. The process of street clearing and the increasing regulation of public space in respectable neighborhoods helped to fan this sentimentality as respectable men feared that Punch shows were fast becoming a relic of the past. (Crone 1071)

Henry Mayhew named his satirical periodical, launched in 1841, after Punch, and many of the covers included Punch in their illustrations. The progress of the periodical's political leanings mimics Punch's in that it began as a relatively radical paper and eventually tamed as it grew in popularity and readership. In its inaugural issue, Mayhew and his partner, Ebenezer Landells, explained their choice of name:

Our title, at first glance, may have misled you into a belief that we have no other intention than the amusement of a thoughtless crowd, and the collection of pence. We have a higher object. Few of the admirers of our prototype, merry Master Punch, have looked upon his vagaries but as the practical outpourings of a rude and boisterous mirth. We have considered him as a teacher of no mean pretensions, and have, therefore, adopted him as the sponsor for our weekly sheet of pleasant instruction. (Punch 1)

As to Punch's repeated avoidance of justice, Mayhew and Landells said the following:

We now come to the last great lesson of our motley teacher – the gallows! that accursed tree which has its root in injuries. How clearly Punch exposes the fallacy of that dreadful law which authorizes the destruction of life! Punch sometimes destroys the hangman: and why not? Where is the divine injunction against the

shedder of man's blood to rest? None *can* answer! To us there is but ONE disposer of life. At other times Punch hangs the devil: this is as it should be. Destroy the principle of evil by increasing the means of cultivating the good, and the gallows will then become as much a wonder as it is now a jest.

4. PUNCH IN AMERICA

Punch's evolution in America is an excellent example of the effects of representational control. In American hands, the traditional Punch narratives take on dramatically different connotations depending on both the persons performing the story and the audience for whom the production is intended. Punch, continuing to represent urban labor, became a tool for dialogue in shifting economic times, with the narrative unfolding to represent the concerns and prejudices of the persons paying for the production.

The discussion of Punch's evolution in America must be preceded by a discussion of the social, political and cultural differences between England and America. America, outside of various Native American tribes, had no form of folk puppet theatre to shape the character and narrative of Punch. However, Punch's arrival early in the development of America's cultural identity allows the gradual modifications to the traditional English performance tropes to reflect changing American attitudes. Punch, as an imported champion of the laboring class and usurper of authority, was embraced by the fledgling country as both a functional element of nostalgia⁷ and rebellious figure. Before any analysis of Punch's relationship to America's laboring class, some characteristics of American labor should be examined.

In the decades following the American Revolution, the American people embraced the notion of a classless country. American visitors to England found

the developing industrial cities distasteful and at odds with the “Jeffersonian Ideal” proposed by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1787. “Those who labor in the earth,” he wrote, “are the chosen people of God if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”

The notion of classlessness extended to popular amusements. Early Americans, particularly the Puritans, Quakers and Presbyterians in Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania, viewed theatre as one of the very sources of moral depravity they had emigrated to escape. In the developing urban centers of the British Colonies, theatre provided the wealthy a link to European culture. As tensions with Britain increased within the Thirteen Colonies, theatre going was affiliated with pro-British sentiment, and it was banned by the Continental Congress during the American Revolution (Nathans 37).

The need for autonomy from British imports and the lack of practicality of an exclusively agricultural way of life after more than a handful of generations of partible inheritance made the Jeffersonian Ideal impossible, and Americans were certain they could develop a democratic industry (Dray 16-17). Tench Coxe, a delegate to the Continental Congress and spokesman for the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts (of which Benjamin Franklin was a member), envisioned a new kind of factory system that

was democratic and morally sanitary, allowing Americans the ability to retain their humanity within the industrial machine. "God forbid that there ever may arise a counterpart of Manchester in the New World," wrote an American upon his return from the English city (21).

Initial attempts at such a system, particularly in the textile mills opened in 1814 in Lowell, Massachusetts, employed women almost exclusively, assuming the work in the factories would be a temporary step in the employees' economic life cycle, as it was presumed they would eventually marry and settle down in a rural area. Men held supervisory positions. The women were well kept, housed primarily in tidy boarding houses, with their supervisors charged with safeguarding their moral temperaments. The young ladies were allowed to publish an internationally circulated literary journal, the *Lowell Offering*, and visitors soon arrived from around the world to inspect the new model factory, even earning the praise of industrial critic Charles Dickens upon his visit in 1842 (23-25).

The first mention of a Punch and Judy in the British Colonies is an announcement for performances at the Coach and Horses in Philadelphia, listed in the *Gazette* in December of 1742. Additional advertisements for public house performances appeared in the September 1747 *New York Gazette* at the Sign of the Spread Eagle (Howard Ch. 1). The popularity of John Payne Collier's *Punch and Judy: A Short History with the Original Dialogue*, with five editions printed in three

years, indicates that by its printing in 1828, Punch and Judy were already widely recognizable on American soil.

Americans quickly made changes to the traditional characters of the English Punch and Judy Show, primarily due to regional differences. For example, the Crocodile that was eventually substituted by the English middle classes for the Devil was replaced by an Alligator, since it was indigenous to America (Howard Ch. 4). Lawmen were often recast as Policemen or Sheriffs, who replaced the Hangman entirely in representation of a united judicial system.

After the Revolutionary War, as theatres reopened, the theatre became a staunch reminder of economic divisions within American society. Theatrical seating, by its very nature, was divisive and classist. Private box seats were both conspicuous and more expensive than pit seats, which were, in turn, more expensive than the balcony (gallery) seats. In post-revolutionary America, aristocratic behavior was condemned as un-American, and the hierarchal structure of theatrical seating often prompted displays of displeasure. When Washington Irving was “saluted aside [his] head with a rotten pippen,” and stood to shake a cane at the offenders from the gallery, a man behind him insisted he “sit down quietly and bend [his] back to it” to avoid further wrath, both for his safety and that of those around him (Levine Ch. 1).

By 1830, theatres began to distinguish themselves according to class. The Park Theatre became a preferred location for New York City’s well to do, while

the Bowery and Chatham theatres became the establishments most often frequented by laborers. The latter included more melodramatic fare, alongside skill and variety acts. Actors were rewarded when they expressed fervent patriotism or anti-British sentiment. In the upscale theatres, actors were often imported from Europe, frequently from England, and they utilized a more restrained acting style (Levine Ch. 1).

In 1848, the Astor Place Riot demonstrated the ways in which patriotic and anti-classist sentiment had become intertwined with popular amusements. The new Astor Opera House was designed to appeal to New York's wealthy, with traditional benches replaced by subscription-only upholstered seats, and very few seats available for general admission. The prices of these tickets were increased, and a dress code was established (Levine Ch. 1).

Often credited as the source of the riot was a feud between two Shakespearean actors, American Edwin Forrest and Englishman William Macready. Forrest was a favorite amongst the laboring classes, known for his fervently expressed patriotism and mastery of the American melodramatic, emotional acting style. Macready, by contrast, exemplified the cerebral, stoic performance style popular in England at the time. Macready's description of Forrest's fans as "vulgar," "coarse," "underbred" and "ignorant" certainly offended the American laborers who had embraced Forrest, and reinforced the notion that the imported British performers were classist (Levine Ch. 1).

In 1848, the Astor Opera House hired Macready to star in *MacBeth* on the same evening that Forrest had been hired to perform the same role at the Broadway Theatre favored by the laborers. Forrest's supporters showed up en masse, pelting the actor with rotten vegetables and seating material ripped from the new theatre in a successful attempt to disrupt Macready's performance. Members of New York's elite, including Herman Melville and Washington Irving, wrote public appeals for an encore in a local paper (Cliff 196-199). Subsequent court documents indicated that "this letter had a very different effect from what its signers had anticipated, and greatly intensified the opposition. It was regarded as a challenge ... by a few representing the wealthier classes to the less prominent part of the community (The People 5)."

The "less prominent part of the community" immediately began distributing pamphlets encouraging people to come out in protest of the encore performance, and rumors spread that the British vessels in the harbor intended to rally to Macready's physical defense. The mayor, recognizing the volatility of the situation, requested the performance be canceled. When the Opera House management refused, he stationed a strong police force and a uniformed militia outside the theatre in anticipation of a riot.

The assembled mob greeted the show of law enforcement with dares to fire on American citizens to protect one British actor. They were answered with the firing of three volleys into the crowd, killing between twenty and thirty

Americans (many of whom were bystanders) and hundreds were wounded. In one remarkable event, the assumption of America as a country free from class distinction had been abolished, with popular entertainment as catalyst.

That Punch was an imported British commodity did not appear to harm his popularity. In addition to Punch's anarchistic attitude, the key to his popularity may be linked to the performance constrictions inherent in puppetry. Marionettes, with their multitude of joints, allow for subtlety of movement that is impossible to duplicate with glove puppets, but limit the ability to directly manipulate the playing space. Glove puppets allow for better use of properties, as the inclusion of the hand within the puppet allows the puppeteer to grasp and manipulate small objects. Glove puppets also require bold, declamatory gesticulation to communicate. Stylistically, marionettes reflect the more reserved acting style popular in England in the mid-19th century, while the more melodramatic styles favored by the Americans is easier to accomplish with glove puppets. Using the stylistic preferences of the working class people willing to riot over the literal and symbolic deterioration of the notion of a classless America as a barometer, glove puppets directly represent their stylistic preferences for American, egalitarian theatre, associating Punch with America's working class.

Another way in which Punch avoided anti-British sentiment was his affiliation with Dime Museums. Pre-Revolutionary museums, often called

“cabinets of wonders” or “cabinets of curiosities,” were often owned by wealthy intellectuals and opened to the public as centers of enlightenment and scientific inquiry. Post-Revolutionary America, drained of its resources, saw these museums reopened out of a sense of democracy and patriotism, often for a fee. As museums began to compete for patronage, it became increasingly important to display a rotating display of novelties, some of the most popular being “associated-value items,” or items whose value was entirely derived from their associations with famous persons. Often, these items were related to America’s Founding Fathers, further establishing museums as bastions of patriotism (Dennett 2).

Andrea Stulman Dennett credits the rise of America’s urban centers with the shift from academic-oriented museums to the Dime Museum, which served as more respectable entertainment venues than the more rowdy saloons. These museums incorporated a staggering number of amusements under one roof, including dioramas, wax works, relics, freaks, menageries, ventriloquists, magicians and Punch and Judy shows (5-6). The Chatham Museum hosted a Mr. Henry’s Punch and Judy Shows as early as 1829, and Mr. Grimaldi was performing at Peale’s New York Museum and Picture Gallery by 1843 (Howard Ch. 1). Later, P.T. Barnum included them in Barnum’s American Museum. By mid-century, Punch and Judy shows were an expected attraction at the Dime Museum.

Punch's jurisdiction was not limited to urban centers. Indeed, Punch's travels mirrored America's westward expansion. The *Life of Col. David Crockett, Written By Himself* (1860), includes a story of Davy Crockett's encounter with a Punch and Judy show in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1835 (Crockett 259-262).⁸ The narrative details a newly-arrived puppeteer performing alongside an itinerant preacher and fiddler, though the content of the show was then considered assumed and so was not detailed in his account. By mid-century, Carlisle S. Abbott recorded Punch and Judy performances at the Sandy Bar in California (Abbott 114-115). A performer named Oliver Lano was reported to have performed Punch and Judy shows for soldiers on both sides of the Civil War (Howard Ch. 4).

Punch and Judy also found their way into the various concert saloons, described as a “truly diabolic form of shameless and avowed Bacchus and Phallus worship (*New York*



Figure 7: *Inside Harry Hill's Dance House, Houston St. Near Broadway*, by Matthew Hale Smith, 1869 (c) New York Public Library

Evening Post.)” In December of 1861, Punch and Judy appear on the bill for the Canterbury at 585 Broadway in New York City. The following year, the same facility was raided, with the proprietor, the bartender, and fifteen girls of dubious profession arrested (Howard Ch.4). Images from Harry Hill’s Dance Hall in 1869 show a permanent Punch and Judy booth at the top right (Figure 8), a residency they still enjoyed in 1882 (Jennings 393). The *Times* referred to “the puppet shows on the Bowery and Chatham-street attract[ing] large crowds of people, who not only fill the small rooms in which the performances take place, but occupy the entire width of the sidewalk and sometimes extend even into the street” (“The News in Brief”).

Despite the lack of availability of scripts for these saloon shows, it is safe to assume that the performances in these rowdy establishments were not the same sort of family entertainment enjoyed in the Dime Museums, which catered

to the growing middle class. As Punch and Judy shows adapted to their audiences as a rule, it is likely that these saloon performances were designed as something of a rowdy perversion of the arguably more acceptable version of the narrative (Howard Ch. 4). Punch and Judy followed the varied-entertainment phenomenon of the Dime Museum to the vaudeville and circus stages, and could be found travelling with Wild West and Indian Medicine Shows. As saloons were closed or converted to more respectable performance venues, these ribald performances were tamed to be appropriate for the middle class morality to which vaudeville catered.

According to Ryan Howard, Punch and Judy was rarely performed on American streets. He credits this, in part, to a New York State statute that demanded imprisonment of “disorderly persons” found soliciting money on the street between 1819 and 1932. The statute defined disorderly persons as deadbeat dads, fortune tellers, fences, prostitutes, drunks, bums, gamblers, jugglers, rope walkers, puppeteers and “common showmen” (New York Times 1887).

English-born Punch showman John Daisy credited the lack of street performances to the swiftness with which American police officers disbursed crowds gathered for performances on the streets. “In the old country it’s a regular thing,” he explained to a *Times* reporter in 1872, “they couldn’t no more stop Punch and Judy in the streets than they could the Queen” (“Punch and Judy”).

Throughout the 19th century, America's middle class had developed as a crucial part of the development of American culture and economy. Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum make it clear in their book, *The American Bourgeoisie*, that the American middle class included not only merchants, bankers and other creatures of capital, but also small shop keepers, artisans, clerks and schoolteachers, many of whom earned hourly wages and not salaries – an important distinction. Over time, “middle class” was not just a term describing income or social status, but became an adjective. “Middle Class” described a set of morals, expectations, and sensibilities that described a perceived set of values associated with disposable income. As a luxury item, the entertainment industry, Punch and Judy Professors included, had no compunctions about bringing their performances into middle class parlors.

It is important to note that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the factory girls at the Lowell textile mills over their English counterparts was their ability to purchase luxury items for themselves. The increasingly mechanized production systems allowed even the laboring classes access to items that made them appear to be middle class, even if their line of work or income put them in another social category. As the face of America changed, both in terms of industry and ethnic origin, “middle class” as an adjective provided a benchmark for American normativity. Punch and Judy performers were often members of the laboring community, with New York's most famous performers, Gus White

and Johnny Daisy, both working primarily as a sign painter and a carpenter, respectively.

According to Howard, Punch and Judy shows achieved their height in American popularity during the Gilded Age, beginning in the mid 1870s (Ch. 4). By then, Punch had become a fixture on the vaudeville stage, county fairs and public, patriotic, religious or charitable fetes. W. J. Judd reports that, by "1874, the demand for puppets was so great that it became difficult to meet the wants of the many professors that had decided to become performers. Notwithstanding the growing number of actors, in the fall of 1876, not one unemployed Punch and Judy performer could be found in New York City" (Judd 15).

The height of Punch's popularity coincided with what could arguably be described as the closest America has come to date to open class warfare. On June 30, 1877, the *Irish World* warned: "Drive a rat into a corner and he will fight. Drive your serfs to desperation ... and in their desperation they will someday pounce upon you and destroy you." Two weeks later, when the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad announced a ten percent wage cut, the rail workers walked off the job, uncoupling trains to block the tracks and leaving livestock stranded in the yards. The militiamen who were summoned to disburse them, and eventually President Hayes submitted to the railroad's request for federal troops, who succeeded in getting trains moving again. In sympathy for the railmen, other

workers in neighboring towns, including canal men, miners and iron workers, hurled stones and blocked the tracks (Dray 107-109).

Attempts to stave off other rail strikes only exacerbated the situation, with additional confrontations between railway and adjacent factory workers and the military turning bloody. When the strike spread to Philadelphia, the National Guard was called in, composed of Civil War veterans with a Gatling gun. They were greeted at the depot by an angry crowd, and they turned their weapons on the assembled, killing twenty and wounding several others, including women and small children. Local headlines dubbed the standoff “the Lexington of Labor” (Dray 113).

The strike did not remain isolated to the railroads. Across the country, laborers in all trades walked off their jobs. Longshoremen in Galveston demanded raises. When the strikes reached Chicago, a crowd of thirty thousand laborers gathered on Market Street to listen to Albert Parsons, a member of the Workingmen’s Party: “The men who till the soil, who guide the machine, who weave the fabrics and cover the backs of civilized men. We are part of that people and we demand that we be permitted to live, that we shall not be turned upon the earth as vagrants and tramps” (Dray 115).

More frightening to many than the outright rioting was the comparative calm of the General Strike of St. Louis. There, the Workingman’s Party led ten

thousand in an ordered phalanx through the city singing “La Marseillaise,” and workers of all sorts, regardless of race, put down their tools to join them.

The country, particularly those living comfortably in the upper classes, found it no longer possible to ignore the frustrations of society’s marginalized. With such dire want, it underscored a fundamental failure in what Americans considered the world’s greatest democracy. Historian Robert Bruce noted that “middle class people began at last to realize what ‘survival of the fittest’ implied, and to reject it. More than that, they began to question its corollary of rugged individualism” (314). On August 18, 1877, *Harper’s Weekly* announced that the strike illuminated “a vast movement of the poor against the rich, of labor against capital, which is nothing less than absolute anarchy.” Its solution was to relegate this suffering as “the business of the State, that is, the people, to prevent disorder of the kind that we saw in the summer, by removing the discontent which is its cause.”

That the Gilded Age more or less began with a series of major class-related incidents almost forces Punch into the spotlight. As an archetype of the laboring class, narratives surrounding Punch are both familiar and provide a satisfying allegory for the recent class conflicts. Punch beats his wife and murders his baby, openly rejecting the middle class concern with home and family. He openly rebels against the law that comes to administrate justice, using violence against the police officer, much like the majority of strikers. He subverts

the devil, demonstrating contempt for religion. He is eventually eaten by a crocodile, thwarted at last by nature. The story is satisfying for both the laboring and middle classes.

Another way in which Punch was used to discuss contemporary social concerns is the incorporation of racially-oriented characters and humor in the narrative, which was also characteristic of the Vaudeville stage. In 1880, William H. Bishop discussed the “Americanized” Punch and Judy shows on Coney Island, “of which the ethnologist should take note, with negroes and so on in the companies” (362). According to Howard, African Americans (called the Negro, Darky, Black Boy, or Sambo⁹), Germans (called the Dutchman), and the Irish (often called Pat or Patsy) were frequently included in performances, and Native Americans, Chinese and Jews often made appearances (Ch. 4). Characters popular in other American media were often incorporated, including Happy Hooligan, the Irishman of comic strip fame, sailors and pirates, preachers and the occasional Bolshevic.

Racial stereotypes were a major component of American entertainment culture. While extant material doesn’t directly describe the use of these ethnic characters within the Punch narrative, their depiction can be inferred by the depictions of similar characters in extant vaudeville scripts and cartoon periodicals. Within vaudeville scripts, Germans are typically utilized as a straight-man and the Irish are rowdy, brawling drunks (Madison’s Budget). The

African American characters often reflect the “Step and Fetchit” subservience, and differ from the Shallallah character of English Punch and Judy shows, who represents the foreign exotic.

Punch performers reflected the growing diversity of American culture. Abraham Liebshutz and Louis Krieger were two well-known Jewish Punchmen. Cherokee George and Red Boy with the Oka Squaw Indian Medicine Company performed Punch and Judy shows and at least claimed to be Native American. There is no extant material indicating any black puppeteers. Punch and Judy performers came from all walks of life, though the majority of performers that performed regularly were generally from the laboring class. Primary professions included barbers, farmers, house painters, newspaper employees, physicians, carpenters, stenographers, and saloon owners (Howard Ch. 4). There were also a number of amateur performers, due to the relative ease of manipulating glove puppets.

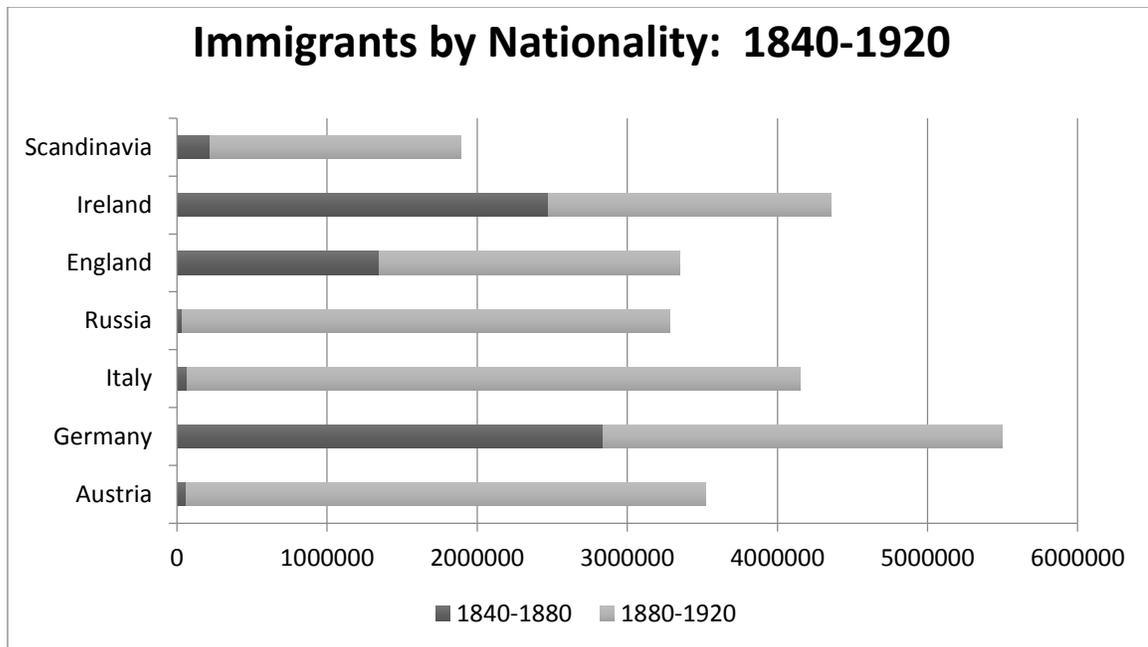


Figure 8: *Immigrants by Nationality, 1840-1920. Data derived from the Immigration Commission Report of 1910 and Census Data. Data from Russia includes the Jewish diaspora.*

The inclusion of racially-oriented characters in the Americanized performances reflects the shifting immigration patterns of the late 19th Century. Prior to 1870, the bulk of United States immigrants were English, Irish and German, who for the most part shared cultural, religious and linguistic traits with the “native” American culture. The Franco-Prussian War in 1870 prompted a second wave of German emigration, making them the dominant immigrant group throughout the 19th century. At the same time, Irish immigration began to decrease as immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe increased, bringing with them languages, cultures and religions that were materially different from previous immigrant groups.

By the late 1880s, the “new immigrant” was becoming a cause for national concern. The Immigration Act of 1882 imposed a \$.50 tax on all new immigrants. The Alien Contract Labor Law of 1885 aborted the trend of American companies (such as the railroads) from importing their workers from foreign countries. The year 1888 represented an anomaly for immigration in that decade (838,131 European immigrants, double the number in the preceding and following years, and a number that would not be reached again until 1903, when annual immigration reached one million persons), and did not reflect so large a shift in immigrant character. However, for the first time, it included measurable numbers of Southern and Eastern Europeans.

By the 1890s, Congress took an active hand in European immigrant restriction. The Immigration Act of 1891 refused entry to any immigrant fitting the following description:

All idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become a public charge, persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease, persons who have been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude.

(Immigration Act 1084)

International ports of departure were increasingly manned by medical committees that inspected immigrants for physical and mental fitness, a process that was repeated at American ports. Steamship companies aggressively

marketed immigration in certain countries to increase the sale of their tickets, and became responsible for the return transport of any immigrant who failed to meet the criteria once arriving in America.

The popularity of the ethnic stereotype on American stages directly reflects public anxiety relating to the changing face of American society. For humor to be successful, it relies on reflecting, distorting and pacifying the fears of its audience. While topical headlines might include instances of racial violence, these elements are not depicted on Vaudeville stages or within Punch and Judy Shows. Instead, fears relating to immigration and class warfare are depicted using benign stereotypes – the stage Italian sings merrily and is good with children, but he is not part of the mafia. The stage Irishman is drunk and rowdy, and is often among the working class, so his inability to ascend is tied to his racial tendencies, not to some dysfunction of the American dream.¹⁰

The usurping of Punch by the middle class may partially be rooted in the increasing focus on children as separate from adults, and childhood as an experience that required careful curating to develop well rounded citizens. This sensibility developed an artistic and material culture distinct from that of adults, including the mass production of toys and the publication of a number of children's books on how to play, including *Every Boy's Book*, *American Girls Handy Book*, and several others. Many of these provided instruction on developing Punch and Judy shows within the home, and Punch and Judy puppet sets could be procured at Macy's (Howard Ch. 5).

Howard suggests the association of Punch with children's culture lies in his English roots, as the childhood culture of the Gilded Age was largely associated with English rhymes, tales and legends. American children continue to be raised with tales of King Arthur and his round table, and recite "Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum; I smell the blood of an Englishman" (Ch. 5). More importantly, it allows middle class children to play-act a class narrative in which the stubborn, anarchic working class figure is eventually thwarted.

This new child-oriented culture also encouraged the development of children's birthday parties, which allowed young children the opportunity to learn social manners. As Thomas Atkins described, "where the parents are aristocratic and exclusive, the little folks imbibe the same spirit. At a very tender age they are capable of becoming very select in their associations and they carefully distinguish between the different classes" (Atkins 304-305). The *New York Times* described the burgeoning profession of children's party director in 1891. And "what children's party is brought to a perfect state of merriment unless with the greetings and comicalities of Mr. Punch?" William Judd asked his readers ("Her Point of View" 14).

Thomas Ward's 1874 script was intended to modify the traditional Punch and Judy show for "polite society; in proper character, free from superfluous verbiage, and dressing the play in phraseology commensurate with the progress of the age - good taste and refinement," free from all "vulgar and impure

language,” which “would not for an instant be tolerated by the people of this country” (3). It is notable that his issue is with vulgar language, not with the play’s filicide, uxoricide, or class elements.

According to primary documents, one of the primary ways of subverting questionable material was to include interjections from the showman, chastising Punch’s bad behavior. In J.M. Barrie’s *Sentimental Tommy*, published in 1896, after Punch beat Judy, the showman popped up from behind the booth to give the following moral lesson:

Ah, my dear boys and girls, what a lesson is this we sees, what goings on is this? He have bashed the head of her who should ha’ been the apple of his eye, and he does not care a – he does not care; but mark my word, his home will now be desolate, no more shall she meet him at his door with kindly smile, he have done for her quite, and now he is a haunted man. Oh, be warned by his sad igsample [sic], and do not bash the head of your loving wife. (397)

The material remained predominantly unchanged, but the violent tendencies of the lower classes are used as an example of what *not* to do.

This cult of the child was not extended to the children of the working class. In the last quarter of the 19th century, it was custom for most middle class children to have nurseries while the majority of the working class children were literally on the street. An 1881 article in *Harper’s Weekly* describes the children of

the urban working poor, who were often seen “sucking stale beer from the kegs in front of saloons, smoking filthy cigar butts or the rejected ends of cigarettes, gambling at pitch tables” (“Guarding” 519). It is notable that the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was not founded until 1875, almost a decade after the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Between 1872 and 1875, the *New York Times* organized picnicking outings for poor children between 1872 and 1875. The *Times* reported that the majority of the eighteen thousand children participating in first of the outings had never seen a Punch and Judy show. That the provision of such a show was a treat bequeathed to urban working class children by an institution such as the *Times* indicated the dramatic differences in audience composition for English and American shows. In England, the children of the working class would have composed the majority of a typical audience (Howard Ch. 6).

That America found solace in Punch during one of its most turbulent social times is important. The very name given to the era, the “Gilded Age” indicates a profound unease. The development of mass production had allowed even members of society’s lowest rung access to occasional luxury or leisure related items. The railway system, the World’s Fairs, early motion pictures and other expressions of technological modernity created a perception of generally increased standards of living. Underlying this experience were the feelings of

alienation and tension created by industrialization, imperialism and urbanization. The recent traumas of the Civil War and the equally divisive Reconstruction Period, alongside the growing antagonism between labor and capital emphasized that this was by no means a Golden Age, it was merely Gilded. It is perhaps for this reason that denizens of America's seediest saloons and the finest sea side homes found the violent antics of Punch so compelling. Punch and friends created an opportunity for cultural symbols to act out social concerns in a safe, objective way.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The transition from the petty commodity production by free-producing craftsmen of the semi-feudal Early Modern era of Pulcinella's birth to the formations of strong labor unions by the end of the 19th century as Punch became benign marked one of the most important transformations of human society. The dawn of Capitalism in urban centers of the Italian peninsula¹¹ and the concomitant birth of Pulcinella indicate that both performers and audiences recognized the need to play out their social experience on the stage.

The evolution of Pulcinella's narrative in his English language lineage demonstrates the push and pull of cultural control of popular opinion of the urban laborer by various social classes as performed in the confines of the theatre. His treatment at the hands of evolving social classes provides a unique opportunity to see the ways in which the unease of shifting social relationships are performed by the classes in control of the narratives.

The adoption of Punch by the *petite bourgeoisie* by the end of his evolution is, in itself, a revelation of the relationship between the working and middle class. The middle class owes its existence to the Industrial Revolution, as their emergence is directly related to the management of labor on behalf of capital. As an intermediary and managerial figure in the production and distribution of

capital's goods, they were not culled from the low end of the capital, but promoted from the topmost ranks of the working class.

This means that middle class had a cultural memory of urban labor entertainments. Indeed, many of the members of the *petite bourgeoisie* patriarchy in the mid-19th century would have had memories of Punch in his bawdy street and saloon glory before their ascension from the working class. Even individuals born into the *petite bourgeoisie* could admire the antisocial behavior of Punch as representative of the sorts of moral freedoms granted the working class. As an ascendant class, middle class individuals were expected to adhere to Victorian morality, and could not maintain respectability and openly carouse in drinking dens, visit prostitutes, or engage in otherwise rude behavior. The working class did not share these social taboos.

By bringing Punch into the nursery and making him a cautionary tale, the middle class taught class distinctions to their children by assigning bad behavior to the working class. The concurrent display of nostalgia and condemnation indicates a class both rejecting and mourning their cultural origins in their process of class ascendancy.

In this thesis, we have explored only one of the many lineages of Pulcinella, but his evolution as a representative of the urban laborer on popular stages was not unique to England and America. The evolution of France's Polichinelle and his close-cousin Guignol, the German Kasperle, the Netherlands'

Jan Klaassen, and Russia's Petrushka all hold clues to the ways in which the tensions between labor and capital evolved over time in their respective countries.

That Punch in puppet form retained his popularity long after Pulcinella and other commedia dell'arte figures faded in international popularity is a combination of the malleability of his temperament and the versatility of puppetry. Howard attributes the popularity of Punch in America to his ability to represent social disorder, which served as an antidote for the oppressive demand for standardization and conformity required of the late 19th century mechanized working conditions, Victorian prudishness and religious fundamentalism, which contrasted with American ideals of individual freedom. Punch's antics reflected the social inversions that made Carnival such a crucial cathartic social release (Howard Ch. 7).

The abstract nature of a puppet provided an unparalleled distance between the performance and spectator, freeing the puppeteer to explore social taboo in ways that human actors could not. Moreover, the inherent symbolism of a puppet reflected some of the feelings of helplessness rooted in the late 19th century.

A puppet, both as a tool for performance and as a metaphor, is manipulated by a greater, external force against whose authority he is helpless. The malleable ending of the performances – whether Punch answers for his

crimes or escapes with his eternal soul intact – allows the producers the opportunity to determine whether Punch retains some tool by which to subvert the Puppeteer (who, rather literally in the case of middle class performances, speaks for morality).

According to Punch and Judy tradition, Punch will always revolt against authority figures and engage in socially unacceptable acts, but the manner of his denouement reveals what his audience finds most egregious. Does the hangman hang him for his rebellion against authority and the state, is he whisked to hell by the Devil for his transgressions against god, or does the crocodile eat him after he subverts them all for his refusal of the new social order?

NOTES

- ¹ It was later determined that much of Collier's references were entirely falsified.
- ² See work by the joint venture of Matthew Wilson of the Faction of Fools, the Italian Cultural Association SAT at incommedia.it, along with their annual celebration of International Commedia dell'Arte Day.
- ³ Ducharte is fairly convinced of Pulcinella's origin in Atellan Farce, though he notes the distinct lack of evidence linking the two. He relies heavily on a bronze statue discovered in Rome in 1727 that is purported to be an ancient Roman depiction of Maccus, though it is not identified. Of the statue, he says the following: "In order to prove his lineage we have only to compare the little antique bronze figure which was unearthed at Rome in 1727 with the portrait of the seventeenth century Pulcinella in the Museum of the Comédie-Française. Never was a case of direct descent more clearly established." (210)
- ⁴ Notably, the same fellow wrote an erotic poem called *The Choice of Valentines*, likely during the same year, which was lambasted as obscene by his contemporaries.
- ⁵ *Taming of the Shrew*, III, 1, line 37. *As You Like It*, II, 7, 158. *Othello*, I, 2, 12. See also various references to "zanies" in *Love's Labor's Lost*, V, 2, 463, *Twelfth Night*, I, 5, 96, and Bottom's Bergamask dance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.
- ⁶ And bear-baiting, apparently.

⁷ Many of the early Punch advertisements describe the puppet shows as being representations of authentic, old-time Englishness.

⁸ As Crockett died at the Alamo in 1836, it's unlikely that this narrative is based on anything that Crockett actually wrote.

⁹ The English Punch and Judy shows often included an African character called Shallaballa.

¹⁰ There is significant scholarship on the portrayal of ethnic stereotypes in late 19th century American culture. See articles written by Paul Antonie Distler (including "Exit the Racial Comics"), Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorinson (including "Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival"), James Dorman (especially "American Popular Culture and the New Immigration Ethnics: The Vaudeville Stage and the Process of Ethnic Ascription" and "Ethnic Stereotyping in American Popular Culture: The Depiction of American Ethnics in the Cartoon Periodicals of the Gilded Age"), Alison Kibler (especially "The Stage Irishwoman"), and Holger Kersten (including "Using the Immigrant's Voice: Humor and Pathos in 19th Century 'Dutch' Dialect Texts.") I have also written on the subject: <https://digital-library-txstate.edu.libproxy.txstate.edu/handle/10877/4174>

¹¹ Italy, of course, was one of several areas in which Capitalism blossomed early, primarily due to trade. Other areas include England and the Netherlands, both of which adopted Pulcinella lineages early on.

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