PROBLEMS IN THE STORAGE, CATALOGUING, AND FILING OF PUPPET MATERIAL

Grace Well

To anyone interested in theatrical history, it is self-evident that a puppet is created for and functions only in relation to a set of particular circumstances and a special environment. Consequently, if in a museum the puppet is to have meaning, it must be accompanied by a large collection of accessories and information, say, in the form of books, tapes, slides, scenery, or photographs. This presents special problems of housing and cataloguing: the problems may range from a four-foot knight weighing eighty pounds to a scrap of paper on which a scenario is scrawled in long-faded ink.

Our own puppet collection, although still small, now represents the traditional theatres of fourteen different countries and includes armored puppets, poster, bulletins, photographs, and manuscripts. Our problems are first to store this incompatible reference, which is both fragile and bulky, and second to catalogue and file it.

The first step is to consider the purpose of the collection. Children, artists, and puppeteers must be able to use it to advantage; students of theatrical history, social conditions, and particular countries must find it valuable, as well as those interested in linguistics and dialectology, ethnology, folklore, and popular traditions. We are faced, then, not only with a perplexing variety of content, but also with the problem of dispensing information about it to a perplexing variety of interested persons. We must evolve some plan which will enable the collection to function as an educational reference and still enhance its visual life as a museum. This plan must also permit any degree of expansion.

It is extremely premature for me to write of our efforts to solve these problems. Our collection is small and not yet organized. Much of our time is being siphoned off in research. However, our ideas about how to cope with these difficulties may be helpful to others, even though circumstances may later change or prevent our adherence to any such "blueprint."

To function most effectively, we intend to become an ambulant museum, giving exhibitions and lectures in universities and other museums, but having a central home for office and files. By this means we hope to take our material to those who would otherwise not have access to it. We have bought a small legitimate theatre, long in disuse, in our home town of Stony Creek, Connecticut, very near Yale. It is in fine condition, and affords ample room for storage, office, files, and a library, as well as providing a large auditorium that can be used either for exhibitions or for guest productions. The puppets, here and elsewhere, will be shown on demonstration stages, together with supplementary puppets and information.

The cataloguing will follow the needs of an ambulant museum. The filing will follow the wise experience of Mr. George Freedley concerning fugitive material, outlined in Gilder and Freedley, Theatre Collections in Libraries and Museums (1936).

A museum such as ours must contain a presentation book that shows photographs of puppets, scenery, and demonstration stages that are immediately available and within our jurisdiction. It must also contain a summary of information about these and references to any related material in the files. Supplementary books will represent large geographic areas, or special fields, such as shadow puppetry. They will also list large collections which might furnish material on loan, together with ownership and agencies. These are to be portable loose-leaf photographic books with a transparent protective covering for each page.

Each such page will be duplicated without photographs in card index files. Other card files will be devoted to books, theatres and puppeteers, authorities in special areas, propaganda and cultural commissions, and puppet organizations together with the people active in them. For the student, card files cross-indexed as to country and type will indicate what is available in the large files which store manuscripts, scenarios, photographs, posters, bulletins, epinal, prints, tapes, and films.

All manuscript material will be housed separately and will be available only to those who have a serious reason to study it. All photographic material will be kept in a large envelope file, mounted with corners on cardboard, so that it is removable. The ownership, as well as theatre, date, and circumstances, will be written clearly on the back as well as on the cardboard mount. Prints, engravings, epinal, and programs are to be stored in the like manner. Posters and large bulletins will be mounted on cardboard and stored in a standing rack.

Another large envelope file will contain separate material concerning individual theatres of importance. Each envelope will be devoted to a particular theatre, its history and repertory, and will contain any typescript unpublished texts available. The outside of the envelope will list the theatre, puppeteer, dates, city, and country. Wherever possible, plastic covers should protect fugitive material.

This plan must be considered a working diagram to solve the complex problems of a puppet collection which is now being organized, in an area which has as yet to assume an identity in the study of folklore.

INDEXING MATERIALS IN THE INSTITUTE FOR DIALECT AND FOLKLORE RESEARCH AT UPPSALA, SWEDEN (cont.)

Mythological traditions
The heathen gods
Wodan (Odin)
Tales about Wodan:

The wild hunt
Informant sees a woman running by, then two dogs, and after him a hunter - - - he gives bread to the dogs and gets a promise of reward - - -
Småländ (province)
Ålgstuff (parish of provenance)
Nr. 92:45, page 47 ("entrance number")

The wild hunt
Informant sees an old woman running past him, followed by a dog and a riding man - - - after a while he returns with the old woman hanging over the horse - - -
Västergötland (province)
Skånings-Åsaka (parish)
111:297, page 20 ("entrance number")