HISTORY OF PUPPETS
TRICKS AND MAGIC

- The history of puppetry is closely related to feats of magic and conjuring.
- They both use sleight of hand and illusion.
The earliest evidence of magic is a painting of a conjurer performing cups and balls, in a wall painting from Beni Hasan in Egypt. It dates from about 2500 B.C.
Magic and conjuring was not just limited to Egypt.

It also occurred in ancient India, China, and Babylon.
The earliest conjurer for whom we have a name is Dedi from ancient Egypt.

He was named in the Westcar Papyrus from 1700 B.C.
EARLIEST CONJURERS

- This image is of a prehistoric shaman dating from 13,000 B.C.
- The painting was found in a cave in southern France.
- These shaman probably performed tricks so that the people thought they were effective.
- These may have been done with dolls/puppets.
Today, the dalang (shadow player) functions as a kind of shaman performing magic (wayang kulit/shadow play) for the healing and exorcism of evil influences.
- Puppetry can be seen as a magician’s trick, where the mode of the movement of the figures is hidden from the audience.
Puppets may first have derived from folk artists’ response to seeing spectacular public presentations of automata.
MECHANIZED TOYS

- Dating from about 2000 B.C., this Egyptian toy kneads bread.
- Its movements are hidden and controlled by strings.
These automata have been found in Egypt, China, Mesopotamia, and India.

The oldest come from Egypt and India.

This is an Indian version (pre-2nd or 3rd century B.C.).

Notice the jointed parts.
WHAT CAME FIRST?

- Many historians and scientists think that toys and dolls are the ancestors of the puppet.
- One indicator is the origin of the word “puppet.”
- Many etymologists have noted similarities in the words used for dolls and puppets in several Indo-European languages.
ARTICULATED DOLLS

• Articulated means jointed.
• Articulated dolls have been found in several children’s graves from ancient Greece and Rome.
• This one is Greek.
LIKE PUPPETS

- Several of these dolls had iron rods extending up from the tops of their heads.
- These rods were used to manipulate the dolls, just like some puppets of today. Other dolls had strings. Some had both.
Many different cultures have used rods and/or strings to manipulate their puppets.

This is a Balinese shadow play puppet.
ACTUAL PUPPETRY

- All of the previously mentioned objects were probably dolls or objects used by magicians.
- The first seemingly actual reference to a puppet play was by Plato in about 366 B.C.
- He mentions all of the essential parts of a shadow play in *Republic*, Chapter VII, “The Allegory of the Cave.”
Egyptian Shadow Form
4 MAJOR TYPES OF PUPPETS

- Shadow
- Rod
- Glove
- String
Today, shadow puppets are used mostly in India and Indonesia.

In these performances, the puppeteer sits behind a screen, and light is projected from behind the screen, so that the puppets appear only as shadows.
The forms and decorations are cut from leather.

They are made in traditional forms so that the audience recognizes the character.

Originally, these were not painted.
ORIGINS

- The shadow puppet is probably the oldest type.
- One can imagine a prehistoric shaman casting shadows of his human ancestors in a ritual worship in front of a campfire.
- It is certain that puppets started out as objects to use in religious rituals.
- They probably evolved in Egypt and India first.
ORIGIN?

- They do share characteristics across cultures.
- They are always in profile with one leg in front of the other.
- Notice the similarity between a Java puppet and an Egyptian wall painting.
ROD PUPPETS

- The first rod puppets were shadow puppets.
- India and Indonesian puppets were manipulated with rods from below, and Chinese from the side.
Later puppets were not flat, but carved and painted.

Notice the rods for manipulating the arms.

Because of the use of rods, this type of puppet is a “rod puppet.”
CONTEMPORARY ROD PUPPET
GLOVE PUPPETS

- These probably developed in China.
- They used rod puppets with cloths to cover the rods.
- The puppeteer put his hand inside the clothes to move the rods.
Later, the rods were eliminated.

Today, glove puppets are manipulated with fingers in the arms of the puppet.

Most puppets today are glove puppets.
Historians are fairly certain that string puppets evolved out of automata.
Mid-Eastern Influences

- During the Middle Ages, Persian and Arabian cultures created innovative buildings and enjoyed entertainments not known in Europe.
- For instance, Persians played chess and watched shadow play performances.
- Muslims, Greeks and Romans also had automata.
It is probable that when the Moors (Muslims) conquered Spain in 711 A.D., they brought these Muslim traditions.

Notice how this palace in Granada, the Alhambra, resembles buildings from Aladin.
Ancient Persian Chessmen
Egyptian shadow puppets of the Middle Ages
In this image made in 1170 A.D., two children are playing with an automata toy.
There is documentation that string automata were used in weddings and churches in the Medieval period.

At weddings, small figures of the bride and groom would dance. (Bishop of Alexandria wrote in the sixth century.)
During the early Middle Ages, churches would use automata and shadow plays to attract attention and draw people into the church.
MARIONETTES

- Marionette is the term for string operated puppets.
- They originated in France during the Middle Ages.
By the Renaissance, puppet shows were put on for entertainment, and not for religious or ritual purposes.
- Pinocchio is the most famous marionette.
During the 1800’s a famous set of puppets were Punch and Judy. They made fun of society and its foibles.
Dummies and Ventriloquists

- Ventriloquism is documented as far back as ancient Greece.
- The term is Latin for “belly speaker.” They communed with the dead.
- Louis Brabant was the ventriloquist for King Francis I of France.
Due to its early use by charlatans to claim the ability to speak with the dead, which was considered to be a heresy by the early church, it was banned.
It did not really become just a form of entertainment until the late 18th century.

In the late 19th century, Fred Russell introduced the use of the dummy.

They were popular vaudeville acts.
• The dummies are hand puppets with mechanisms for moving the head, mouth, and eyes.

• Edgar Bergen became internationally famous with Charlie McCarthy in 1938. (Candice Bergen’s dad.)
MODERN PUPPETRY

- Due to the invention of new technologies, new forms of puppetry have developed since WWII.
- These new forms include:
  - Supermarionation
  - Muppets
  - Stop-Action Animation
  - Animatronics
In the 1960’s, Gerry Anderson and his colleagues pioneered supermarionation.

This combines marionettes with electronic components, typically to control facial features.
MUPPETS

- Jim Henson invented the first Muppets in 1955.
- He coined the term, Muppets, because his puppets were half hand puppet and half marionette.
Stop-Action Animation

- Tim Burton is famous for a new type of puppetry, stop-action animation.
- In this animation technique, puppets with moveable joints are slightly changed in poses for each photograph.
Animatronics is a direct derivative of automata. Animatronics use robotics technology and computers to create lifelike, moving creatures.
True Theater

- The first true puppet plays were most likely derived from shadow plays.
- Originally, in Indian and Indonesian shadow plays, there was a narrator and the puppets only pantomimed the action. Characters never spoke.
- This tradition was also practiced in Europe.
Eventually, puppeteers began actually having the puppet characters speak for themselves.

When the characters began to speak, they became true plays.
Puppetry was originally closely related to magic and conjuring.

The first people to use puppet-like forms were prehistoric shamans.
The earliest puppets evolved from automata toys and dolls.

These evolved first in Egypt and India.
- Shadow plays were the first type of puppetry.
- Shadow plays evolved in all four of the earliest civilizations: Egypt, India, Mesopotamia, and China.
TYPES OF PUPPETRY

- Traditional forms:
  - shadow puppets
  - rod puppets
  - glove puppets
  - string puppets (marionettes)
NEW FORMS OF PUPPETS

- Supermarionation
- Muppets
- Stop-action animation
- Animatronics
**PURPOSE**

- The most important change in purpose over the centuries has been the move to puppetry for a purely entertainment function.