



The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947)

The Paladins of France in America

By Jo Ann Cavallo

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Sicilian puppet theater was the predominant form of cultural expression for working-class southern Italians and Sicilians from the early 1800s until the proliferation of television in the 1950s. This form of dramatic prose theater also flourished in diasporic Italian urban communities, bringing immigrants together for nightly performances of the same deeply cherished chivalric stories. Agrippino Manteo's scripts, examined for the first time in this study, are testimony to the rich substance of the Paladins of France narratives dramatized on the traditional *opera dei pupi* stage. Even beyond their historical and aesthetic value, the alternating episodes of love, enchantment, adventure, and warfare invite us to relive the passion, heartbreak, excitement, and magic of knights and damsels from around the globe – from Europe to North Africa to East Asia – who share the stage with a host of wizards, fairies, giants, and monsters. This study reconstructs the history of the Manteo family marionette theater in New York City across seven decades and three generations, provides translations of eight selected plays and 270 extant summaries, and offers comparative analyses uncovering the creative process of adaptation from Italian Renaissance masterpieces of chivalric poetry to nineteenth-century prose compilations to Agrippino Manteo's *opera dei pupi* dramatizations.

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Jo Ann Cavallo (Ph.D., Yale, 1987), Professor of Italian at Columbia University, has published widely on Italian chivalric epic, including *The World beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto* and *The Romance Epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso: From Public Duty to Private Pleasure*.

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