

Marionettes

A HANDICRAFTER'S THEATER

BY MARGARET MONRAD

MARIONETTES are puppets or small jointed figures which are moved from above by strings or from below by means of slender rods. Closely related to them are the hand puppets.

When and where was the first marionette made? No one knows. They have come to us out of the dim ages of the prehistoric past. When was the first drama enacted? When the cave man came home

where they still flourish.* Very grotesque but marvellously intricate and delicate in design are the flat Javanese marionettes moved by rods below, used from time immemorial in shadow plays in connection with religious festivals, a play lasting sometimes a day and night. Shadows are a very common form of marionette play in the Orient. From Persia and over Greece the marionettes arrived in Rome along with other captives of the



Fig. IV — Scene from Marionette Play, *Beauty and the Beast*

from his hunt and, while relating his adventures to his family, wielded his stone hatchet or climbed a tree to show how he had escaped the wild boar. So the marionette play came into existence when child or man first fashioned a miniature figure or doll and made it move and talk, imitating those about him.

Marionettes have been unearthed in age-old Egyptian tombs. They are often alluded to in the writings of ancient Grecian philosophers. The oldest traces of marionettes have been found in India, where they were used, as elsewhere among ancient peoples, in religious ceremonies. There is a legend that the wife of the god Siva made a marionette so beautiful that he fell in love with it and endowed it with life. Many are the quaint old tales about them and their puppeteers in China and Japan,

Roman Empire, where they became very popular.

They taught biblical tales to the illiterate populace in the early church until as late as 1550, when they were driven out from there to the market place, to keep company with Pulchinella, who later became Punch and Judy in England. In the Philosophy Building at Columbia University, there is a marionette which was used in a Christmas crib 200 years ago in Provence.

From Italy, the European home of the marionettes, they travelled all over Europe — to Germany and up through France to England. They were seen by Don Quixote in Spain. Frowned upon by our early puritanical ancestry, it is only of late that these quaint little people have dared take up their

* A collection of Chinese marionettes may be seen at the Natural History Museum of New York City.



Figs. I-III — Scenes from Marionette Play, Beauty and the Beast

abode with us in this country except at times in some out-of-the-way street in the Italian quarter of New York City. However, out West — unknown to most of us — marionettes representing the mystic corn maidens, who gave mankind the seed wherewith to sow, have ground corn between miniature stones for hundreds of years at the great religious festivals of the Hopi Indians. Marionette birds and an evil snake also take part in the ceremony.

Probably the great English artist and scenic designer, Gordon Craig, has done more than any one else to bring the marionette into its own in the English-speaking world. Here and there it has gripped the imaginations of American artists like Tony Sarg, Remus Bufano, Perry Dilly in the West, and others whose travelling troupes are the delight of all childlike souls.

More and more their educational value as a school project is being recognized. The production of such a miniature play requires all the activities of the real stage where the spacial and literary arts are to be welded into a whole. It opens up to the creative imagination visions of unlimited beauty. Libraries are setting up permanent marionette stages in their children's departments.

Perhaps the following may be of help to those who are grappling with the problem of how to make a marionette.

The simplest for small children to make is the rag doll marionette. Sew a small longish bag, rounded at the closed end, of cloth, dyed a flesh color, about 4" long when stuffed. Stuff about a third of its length with cotton for the head; tie a string tightly several times around it for the neck; finish stuffing and before closing insert a weight — for instance, a small hinge, a stone, or some shot in lower end. (See Fig. I.)

Draw a pattern of the leg a little longer than the length of head and trunk together. Sew and only stuff half way up, inserting a small weight in the heel. Sew a seam at knees crosswise to keep stuffing in. Attach the open end of the cloth which is left without stuffing (the thigh) to the hip, making it about equal in length to the lower leg.

Make the arms in the same way, slightly weighting the hands (which should reach to the middle of the thigh). For the lower arm, sew and stuff only half way up and sew a seam crosswise at the elbow.

Sew worsted on for hair; paint or sew the features with colored thread. Then dress the marionette. Directions for stringing are given below.

A larger marionette may be made in the same way out of a stocking. A small stick or cotton may be inserted in the upper arms and thighs; but be sure to leave at least $\frac{1}{2}$ " pliable cloth without stuffing at all of the joints.

But a "real" marionette such as may act in more complicated plays given by older children or professionals — how is it made? There are just as many ways as there are people of ingenuity.

A clay preparation such as PERMODELLO, which hardens, has been used for modelling head, lower arms and legs; but, with the exception of very small marionettes, it is too heavy and will not stand much hard usage.

Almost all European marionettes are carved out of wood. This is a delightful and durable medium, but it requires quite a little skill. Plastic wood has been suggested, but—besides being heavy—it hardens so quickly that it is difficult to manipulate.

Nothing can equal papier-mâché in lightness, durability and ease of handling. Besides it costs almost nothing.



Fig. V — Scene from Marionette Play, *Beauty and the Beast*



Fig. VI — Jim, the Juggler

Materials for a marionette:

Paper towels or newspapers.

Paste (flour and water boiled).

Wire (stove pipe size).

Screw-eyes (smallest size and some about $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter).

Soft pine, white wood or basswood, $1\frac{3}{4}$ " x 2", 1" x 1" and 1" x $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Black linen thread or fine fish line.

The play has been decided upon or, better still, written. You know just what each little actor is to do and say and what he is to look like. You have decided upon the size of your actors — somewhere between 15 and 24 inches.

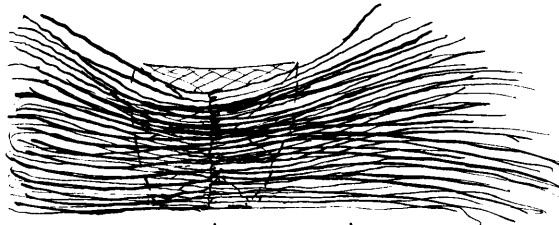
Then make one as the standard, measuring the sizes of the rest in the right relation to it. Suppose it is a villainous pirate and the tallest of the troupe. Make a drawing of him as large as he is actually to be, with as correct proportions as possible, unless you wish a grotesque. If it is a child, make the head larger in inverse ratio to age. (See Fig. II.)

Head — Cut a piece of copper wire and bend it at middle, forming a loop; twist it above loop and

measure on drawing the actual size, placing loop on B and bending ends of wire at A; cut ends off as in Figure II. Cut another piece; make a small loop at each end the length of C D; fasten this at right angles to A B at Z, about one-third below A, with a piece of wire. Twist strips of newspaper around the wires at Z until you have a paper ball somewhat smaller than the size of head; around this core paste strips of newspaper or paper toweling to keep it in shape. Then cover several sheets of paper on both sides with paste; tear them up in small pieces and knead to a plastic mass. A little powdered clay or plaster of Paris may be added, but is not necessary. If a smooth surface is desired, soak the paper over night. Then tear into tiny bits and crumble it in the water, strain and knead with paste. With this build up your head just as you would if working with clay. Be sure to make the depression under the brow for the eyes, below the cheek bones and from the chin to the neck. Add on to the brow and to the cheek bones. Continually see to it that the loop B comes out just below the neck and the side loops just above where the ears



Fig. VII — Jim, the Juggler



YARN STITCHED TO CLOTH FOR YVIG.



Beard. FIG. III

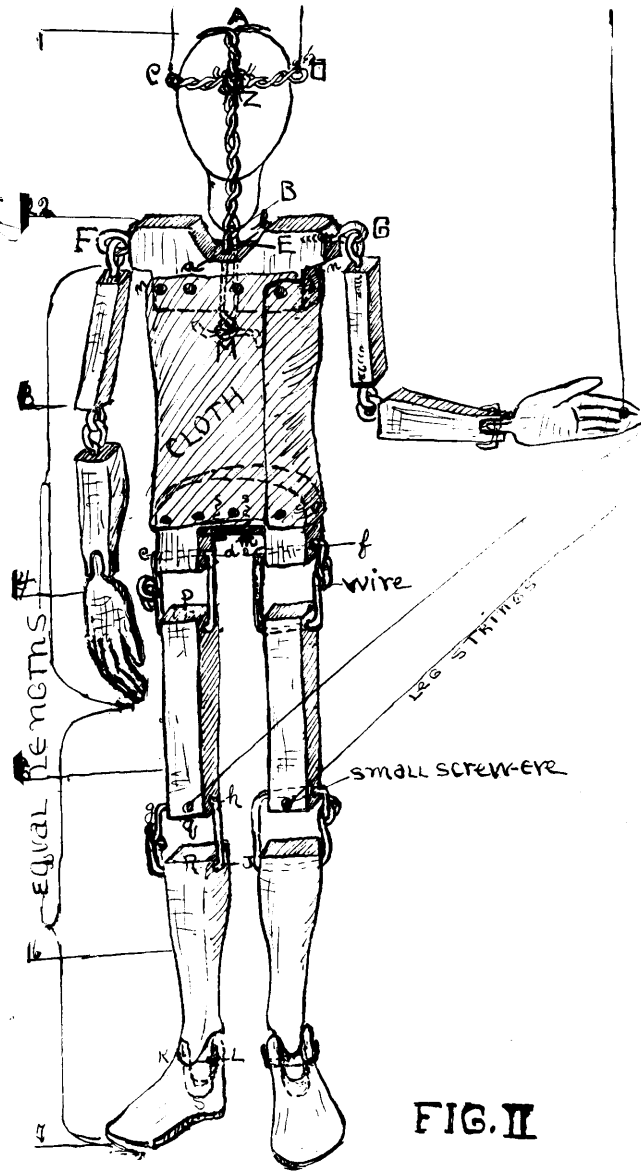
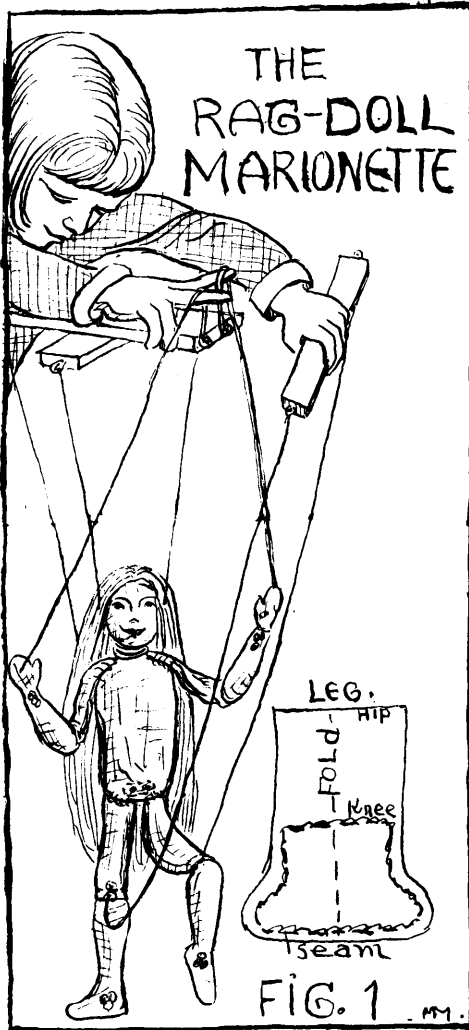


FIG. II

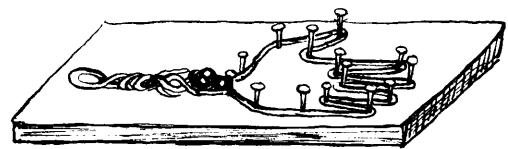
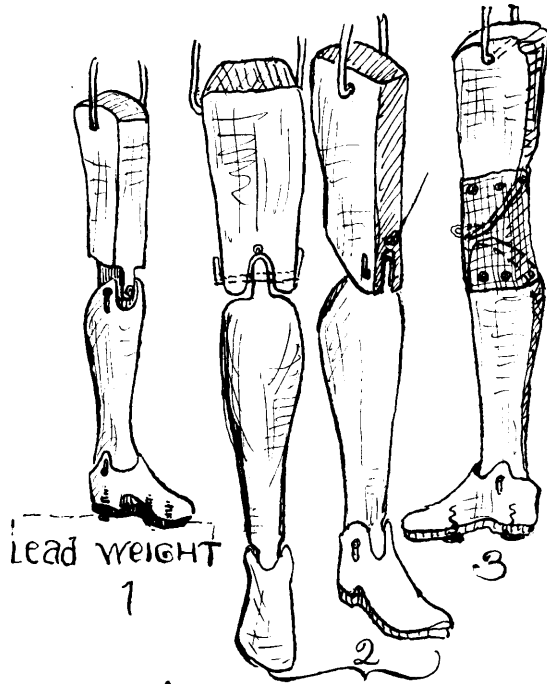


FIG. IV



Lead weight
1

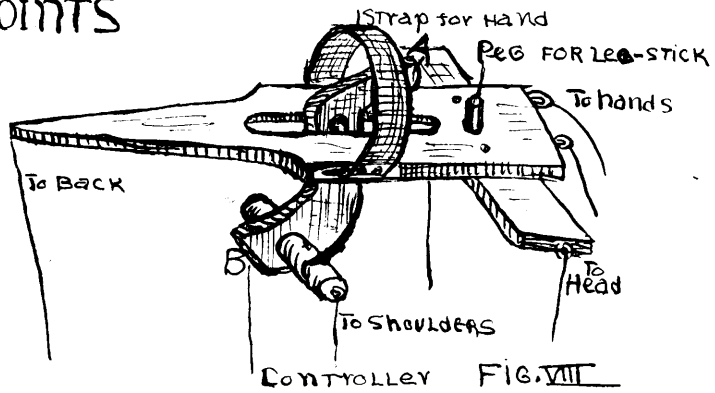
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3

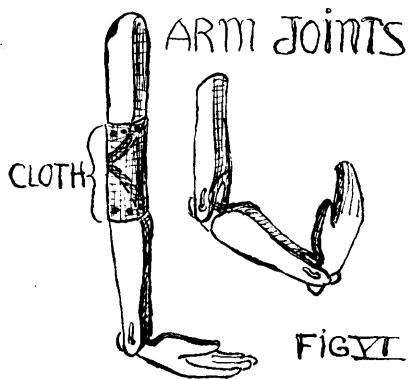
VARIOUS LEG JOINTS
FIG.V



CONTROLLER
8
FIG.VI



CONTROLLER FIG.VII



ARM JOINTS

CLOTH

FIG.VI



ML

should be. Build on to the nose with bits of paper and paste, pinching and pulling it into the desired shape. Is he a villain? Add on to it until it is big and crooked. Is he an ogre? Add still more paper and paste till it is enormous! Is she a sweet maiden? Let it remain small. Is she saucy? Give it a tilt upwards! When you get used to the "feel" of your material, your fingers will deftly fashion fat matrons, thin spinsters, heroic knights, kings and queens, Mongolians and Africans, greatly to your own surprise and delight. Remember that they are to be seen at a distance, and always exaggerate the characteristic qualities, leaving out all unnecessary or unmeaning details.

When the head is finished, put it on a radiator, stove shelf, or in the sun a few days. When dry, fill in depressions with the finer mass of papier mâché or plastic wood. If it can be improved upon, cut away with a knife and add on where needed. When dry, paint with poster paints and varnish, or, if with oil paints, size it first with whiting and glue. To get a still smoother surface, give it also a coat of zinc white before painting it with oil paints.

For a wig, use theatrical hair, silk, cotton or woolen yarn dyed the color wished for, unraveled hemp rope, or real hair,* according to the character portrayed. Lay out the yarn or hair flat on a strip of cloth and sew a seam at the middle, using a sewing machine (Fig. III). Glue the cloth with the hair to the head, shaping it to fit it.

To make the body, saw off a piece of wood F G about $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 2" for the shoulder piece as long as the width in the drawing of actual size. Round slightly at ends. Saw out a V-shaped piece at the center E for the neck and a small piece at n from under each shoulder. Then bore two holes a and b in the center. Through these pass a wire, first putting it through the loop at the neck and twisting the ends together underneath the wood at M.

Cut out a second piece for the hips somewhat

* Obtained at the ten-cent store.

narrower than the shoulders, rounding it at the top. Saw out a piece in the center below at m, where a hinge or a piece of lead should be screwed to weight the trunk. Bore holes for wire through c d and e f. Measure the length of the trunk and nail a piece of muslin from the shoulder piece to the hip piece all around the wood so as to make the trunk the length in your drawing.

For limbs, cut two pieces of wood about 1" x 1" as long as p q. Bore holes for wire at each end. Pass wires from these through c d and e f, fastening the ends together as in Figure II. This makes a very flexible joint. Cut out the lengths of the upper arm and fasten with screw-eyes to the ends of the shoulder-piece.

The lower arms and legs may be made in various ways. The simplest way is to model them out of papier mâché, the length of your drawing, weighting them with a little shot. Drill a hole at the elbow and knee when dry, and attach them to upper limbs by means of a wire joint as described above.

If you wish to be able to change the pose of the hands and fingers, they should be made as follows: Draw the hand the desired size on a board; hammer small nails in the outline wherever the direction is changed. Pass a wire

around these nails (Fig. IV). Lift the wire off. Twist the ends for arms, measuring on your drawing, leaving a loop at the elbows; wind the arms with cotton or tape, inserting a small weight at the wrist; then wind the fingers and arms with woolen yarn. Unless flesh-colored yarn has been used, size with glue and whiting and paint. This hand may be bent into any position desired and may hold and carry objects.

In case the limbs are to be seen above the elbow and knee joints, wood is the best medium making a joint as in Figure V (2). Cloth may also be nailed around the wood as in (3) for the joint. The principle is the same for the elbow (Fig. VI).

The foot may be made flexible by boring a hole

(Continued on page 46)



Fig. VIII — Lot and Abraham for a Biblical Play

floral forms in their tapestry rugs or the winsome charm in the haphazard motifs of their decorated pottery. These are but two of the arts that are copiously treated and illustrated in this book; all the others are just as interesting, just as amusing and just as rich in their value as designing aids.



A REVIVAL OF THE ART OF TAPESTRY WEAVING

(Continued from page 43)

offices, showrooms, apartments and yachts have to be decorated. The textures of tapestries are what give them their peculiar excellence and what distinguish them above all other textiles, just as other textiles are distinguished by texture qualities that raise them above wood and stone and brick and plaster and procelain and paint and the metals. In other words, tapestry has a more interesting texture than any other material in the world and one capable of expressing more in the hands of the weaver, who understands."

As the Master Institute has just entered its new home in the new twenty-four story Roerich Museum Building, splendid facilities are available for the inauguration of its work. In addition to the fine studios for its classes, there is a research library to which the students will have access in their

study of designs and in gaining their historical background. An added advantage of the course will be the opportunity for the students to share in the general cultural courses and lectures, concerts and productions given to the students of the Master Institute for the purpose of developing the broad artistic appreciation of each pupil.



MARIONETTES

(Continued from page 9)

above the heel. Into this fasten the pointed end of the leg by boring and putting a wire through, bending the ends (Fig. II). It should be weighted by screwing a piece of sheet lead under the heel, or inserting shot in it if you model it out of papier mâché.

Now it is ready to dress. Do not design the costume as a thing by itself, but always as part of the larger design of the stage scenery and other puppets. Is the puppet to play a leading part? Be sure then to have the costume stand out boldly in strong contrast to background and other figures, at the same time keeping the whole in harmony. Study what color will best express the emotion of your puppets. Keep the costumes extremely simple—as a problem of spacing and color harmony. Dyeing, block printing and batiking will be of service here.

Then to the stringing! The controller must be made first. Cut a piece of wood 1" x ¼" about 10" long. Screw two tiny screw-eyes at one end for the hand strings and one at the other for the string to the back. Cut another piece 6" long and screw a screw-eye at each end, to which the strings from the wire loops at the sides of the head are to be attached. Nail a strip of cloth or leather to the ends large enough so you can slip your hand in under it; then nail it to the longer piece at right angles nearer one end and string as in Figures I and VII.

Tip the controller forward and your puppet bows. Tip the cross bar and he cocks his head sideways. Lower the controller and he seats himself.

The leg strings fastened to screw-eyes on end of thighs and passed through holes in the clothes are fastened to a "leg stick" about 6" long with a hole in the center to place it on a nail at B when not in use. To make it walk, tip it alternately, simultaneously moving the puppet forward. If the dress touches the floor, no leg strings are needed. Your lady just glides in. Figure VIII shows a more complicated controller which, by pressing the finger on A, lifts A B and causes the puppet to hang from the shoulder strings, liberating the head strings so that the head falls forward in sorrow or nods.

By experimenting in front of a mirror placed on the floor, you will be continually surprised and amused at the things these little actors can do and

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