

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF THEATRE
DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

MATERIAL SHADOWS OF HUMANITY: AN EXPLORATION OF THEATRICAL
PUPPETRY IN RELATION TO THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

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SPRING 2018

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Theatre
with honors in Theatre

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ABSTRACT

In March 2017, I began reading the play *Argonautika* by Mary Zimmerman. I eventually would design and fabricate the puppets for this production, which opened October 27, 2017. *Argonautika* is filled with moments where reality, history, and imagination meet. Birds wheel over the ocean, a golden ram flies above, and dragons do not sleep. Puppets cross between worlds: that of the real and unreal, the living and the dead. These lifeless objects are prone to metamorphosis. They are material, animal, and human all at once. In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato proposes the allegory of the cave to explain not only four ways of thought, but also four ways of life: imagination, belief, reason, and understanding. Theatre encompasses all of these philosophies, from the perspective of the designer, the actor, and the audience. Puppets explicitly relate to the world proposed in the allegory of the cave. They are something outside of our reality. They evoke both imagination and belief yet question our reason and understanding.

This document will explore the ancient yet somehow modern world of *Argonautika*, and the puppets designed and built for this production, but more broadly how puppetry and theatre as a whole, can relate to Plato's allegory of the cave. It shall address how we find the shadows of ourselves presented in the theatre, how we find belief in the story and in the puppet—that which is so obviously material, but gives a new definition to life. This thesis analyzes how our imagination gives life to that which is lifeless and how theatre tries so desperately to impress upon its audience a new reasoning and understanding. This document attempts to better understand the relationship of the audience with the play and with the puppets. Through Plato's allegory of the cave, it shall analyze the four forms of thinking in relation to the theatre, and discuss how theatre and puppetry are but a reflection of ourselves, a shadow of our own reality.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank Milagros Ponce de Leon for her guidance as a designer and artist. I would then thank Dr. Susan Russell for her academic instruction and critique throughout my writing process.

Thank you to the production team for Penn State's *Argonautika*, especially director Steve Snyder, scenic designer Abigaile Wiker, technical director Jason Gottlieb, costume designer Austin Rausch, and lighting designer Jennifer Griffin-Minor. I also would like to thank the amazing cast and crew, especially the stage management team of Lyric Hamilton, Kira Robbins, and Michael Rebarchak.

Thank you to Jay Lasnik and Laurencio Ruiz for your guidance and assistance to the build process for these puppets. An especially large thank you to my two fantastic artisan assistants: Tania Barrenechea and Roderick McCladdie-McCleod. Thank you also to all the other artisans involved: Soledad Sanchez, Bekah Unsworth, and Bekah Achuff.

Thank you to James McDougal and Olivia Girdano for your company and moral support throughout rehearsals and tech.

Thank you to Amanda Stuart and Jenna Houck for your constant care and guidance.

Thank you to Daniel Henderson and Carolyn Harper for your companionship and encouragement.

Thank you to Andrew Lang for your endless love and faith in me throughout this arduous process.

And a final thank you to my family and to my wonderful dog Zahra for their caring support.

Chapter 1

Laying the Foundations

In the fall semester of 2017, Penn State Centre Stage presented a production of Mary Zimmerman's play *Argonautika*. Beginning in pre-production in early April 2017 with an opening October 27, this production was to be a metaphorical mammoth for its production team. With a script that blends epic myth with modern themes and humor, this play was laced with complicated language, actions, settings, costumes, and, most importantly for my purposes, puppets. For this production, I was given the position of Puppet Designer and Lead Puppet Artisan. This meant working with the director, my fellow artisans, and actors to design, build, and prepare the puppets of *Argonautika* for performance. I will speak more to my involvement in this production in Chapter 3 of this document.

It is firstly important for the reader to understand *Argonautika* and its overarching themes, as I will reference them often in this document. Hence, I shall address them fully in this chapter. The play by Mary Zimmerman is based on the Greek epic poem by Apollonius Rhodius, written in the third century B.C.E. The play begins with an introduction of the main character Jason, who is prophesized to overthrow King Pelias and rule Greece. He is flanked by the goddesses Hera and Athena, who swear to protect and guide him in his future journeys. Throughout the play, Hera and Athena will narrate as well as interact with and push forward the story. Jason meets with his uncle, King Pelias, and the audience and Jason learn the story of the Golden Fleece, a mythical relic of Greece lost to the greedy hands of King Aeëtes in Colchis. King Pelias orders Jason to seek out the Golden Fleece and return it to Greece, a mission that he

believes will happily result in Jason's death. Guided by Hera and Athena, Jason musters a crew of heroes and raises a powerful ship, the Argo, to carry him to Colchis. Along the way, he faces several challenges: a sea monster, alluring women, a water nymph, a giant, harpies, and dangerous rocks. When Jason finally reaches Colchis with his band of heroes, called the Argonauts, King Aeëtes meets him with disdain. He dares Jason to yoke his bronze bulls of fire, believing it to be an impossible task. Meanwhile, Hera and Athena plot. With some help from Aphrodite and Eros, they pierce Aeëtes' daughter Medea with love for Jason. A young witch and niece to Circe, the goddesses know Medea can thwart her father's evil plans. With Medea's help, Jason yokes the fire-breathing bulls and defeats an army of skeleton soldiers. They run to collect the Golden Fleece, but find it guarded by a never-sleeping dragon. Again, Medea uses her magic to save Jason, and they retreat to the Argo with the Golden Fleece. However, when the Argo attempts to flee from King Aeëtes' pursuing forces, they are shipwrecked in the desert. They continue their journey homeward, but many of the brave Argonauts fall. Upon their return, Jason abandons Medea and their two children to marry a princess to ensure his claim to the throne of Greece. In her pain, Medea slaughters Jason's new bride and her own children. Hera and Athena dress and send Medea off to the underworld to live in happiness with her second husband, the ghost of Achilles. Believed to be cursed by Medea's dark deeds, Jason is exiled and wanders the desert as an outcast. Eventually, he stumbles upon the shipwreck of the Argo. He plans to hang himself from the mast, but out of mercy, the goddesses allow the wreck to fall on him instead.

Like many other Greek epics, the tale of the Argo, deals with the common theme of love and hubris. Medea sacrifices everything for her love of Jason, but his hubris causes him to abandon Medea. This act leads to the destruction of their love and eventually Jason's life. However, Medea's love is only a small influence on the play. The overarching theme for this

story is the human's desire for the perfect answer. We often believe that we are just one quest away from saving the world. In the case of *Argonautika*, Jason and his companions are of the belief that success in their quest for the Golden Fleece will solve all of their problems. However, even with the Golden Fleece on their shoulders, they fall to ruin and disgrace. The world's problems continue. The play argues that, perhaps, humans are wired to fail. Towards the end of the play, the Argonauts speak as one:

Oh these glorious missions of men, they start out so well,
so full of hope and noble intent: teach the foreigner a lesson,
destroy the tyrant, become a man, defend the nation,
hip, hip, hoorah. Seize that shining Fleece
and the world itself will change, seize that Golden Fleece
and utopia will descend, seize that fleece and
there will be an end to evil.

Whatever.

They all end up like this in the end.^[22]

However, there is still compassion for humanity. Hera and Athena see Jason's flaws and his wrongdoings, and yet they give him an honorable death. There is empathy and grace in failure. Though Medea committed many terrible acts at the end of the story, Athena still sympathizes with her struggle, and she is allowed to descend into the afterlife with grace and beauty. Overall, *Argonautika* speaks to the fragility of humans and the mercy of the gods. This fragility can also be applied to the puppetry of the play, the element that this document shall focus heavily on.

Puppetry

It is a difficult task to define the puppet. Taken literally, the definition would read similar to ‘a moveable object controlled by another for the purpose of entertainment,’ but this description would likely be considered seriously lacking in the eyes of the puppet master. I have read several books on the definition of the puppet and its function—most of them cited in this document—and yet very few authors agree on the topic. The puppet is a meeting of reality, history, and imagination. A blend of sculpture and the actor^[6]. It has the ability to cross between world of living and dead. The puppet seems to be such a fickle creature; it is difficult to pin it down with a simple dictionary definition. However, there is one quote by well-known puppet master and professor of poetry and drama at the University of Rochester, Kenneth Gross, that does the job of describing the puppet quite well:

The puppet is an unpredictable creature. It always crosses between worlds and ferries *us* between worlds. Decidedly a made, material thing, the puppet has the toughness of ordinary objects—the pebble and the paper clip—yet also the resilience of more hidden and elusive entities, things of mind and spirit. Actors that are moved by others, puppets live double lives, often controlling those who seem to control them, controlling the audience’s eyes and ears as well. They tend towards metamorphosis, always shifting their shape and scale, by turns innocent and violent, fiercely alive yet never quite living. You think you know the thing, what it can do, old as the puppet is, and suddenly, as if to mock your certainty, it turns into something else. Just as suddenly, the puppet can make other things in its vicinity its mirrors or doubles—the human walker in the street, the walker’s shoe, a struck match.^[16]

Rather than attempt to describe the nature of the object itself, Gross describes its inexplicability.⁵ Arguably, the puppet is a tool for performance, and puppeteers simply use those tools^[11]. I find, however, to see the puppet as merely a tool, same as any other theatrical prop, is to ignore the greater depth the actor and the audience can find in such an enigmatic creature.

As Kenneth Gross alludes to in the above quote, many puppet masters have found that in puppets, we can find a mirror of ourselves. Penny Francis, author of *Puppetry: a reader in theatre practice*, writes that puppets,

mirror, emphasize, and interpret. They speak to and are understood by the entire world, having little need of spoken language. Pragmatically they respond to the demands humans make of them. More abstractly they respond first to the spirit of the puppeteer who makes and controls them, then to the spirit of the individual spectator^[6].

The puppet is material, animal, and human all at once. The audience's ability to connect with these inhuman yet human objects makes the puppet a topic of great interest. In the case of *Argonautika*, the puppets take the form of shadows, birds, a flying golden ram, a sea monster, a toddler, a giant, two large bulls, and a massive dragon. It is perhaps difficult to imagine, from an outside perspective how these nonliving objects could make such a delicate connection with their theatrical audience. I shall speak more to these actor/audience connections to the puppets of *Argonautika* in Chapter 6 of this document. For this chapter, however, there is one more baseline of knowledge I must impart upon my reader.

Allegory of the Cave

In Book VII of *The Republic*, a Socratic dialogue written in approximately 380 B.C.E, philosopher Plato describes a grim scene that would become known as the Allegory of the Cave. The story is used to describe what Plato calls the Theory of Forms, illustrating four ways or stages of life: imagination, belief, reason, and understanding. In this scene, Plato tells the story of a group of prisoners who have lived in a dark cave since birth. They are bound so that they cannot move and can only look straight ahead. Behind the prisoners is a bridge, and behind that a large fire. On top of the bridge, people manipulate various statues as puppets. These statues cast shadows on the wall the prisoners are facing. To assist in the visualization of this story, I have included an illustration of Plato's Cave from *Great Dialogues of Plato*:



Figure 1. Illustration of Plato's Cave from *Great Dialogues of Plato*^[9]

The prisoners watch these shadows, but because these are the only things they ever see, they believe them to be absolutely real, rather than just shadows of reality. When they speak to one another about “horses,” “men,” or “women,” they are speaking of these shadows. In this, the prisoners represent the first theory of forms: imagination. Imagination is comprised of guesses, images, stories, and opinions. One prisoner is freed from his bonds. Upon turning around, the

prisoner realizes the statues and people above him are real, rather than the shadows he once saw, which were just copies of reality. He recognizes these objects as reality, yet he is not aware of a world beyond the cave. This is the second stage: belief. Belief is the stage of practical common sense, of trial and error. When the prisoner is dragged from the cave to the world above, he is so struck by the bright light he can only look at shadows, then reflections, and then finally at real objects. He sees that these objects are even more real than the statues, which are only copies of reality. This is the stage of cognitive thought and reason. This is the ‘scientific stage,’ when the individual seeks to understand why things are as they are. Finally, the prisoner turns his eyes up to the sky, looking towards the sun and the heavens. He understands the sun is the cause for everything he sees; it gives life and light to the world. This is a representation of the fourth and final theory of forms: understanding. The stage of understanding represents the philosophical approach. Theories themselves are evaluated which leads to what Plato calls “true understanding”^[4,13,15].

With this thesis I shall impart upon my reader an exploration of the ancient yet somehow modern world of *Argonautika* and its relationship—as well as the broader relationship of puppetry and theatre as a whole—to Plato’s allegory of the cave. In *Argonautika*, Zimmerman’s characters go through a more dramatic process of realizing the four Forms of Good. Argonaut Idmon, however, truly sees all these forms and the shape they will take during their journey. Through prophecy, he envisions the trials the Argonauts shall face and the deaths that they shall succumb to, yet he also sees the success and glory of the Argo and the prize of the Golden Fleece that they shall bear home. His companions do not dwell on his warnings, but rather only hear the news of their foretold triumph, for they reside in the first two stages of thought: imagination and belief. Idmon, however, sees the true wretchedness that their journey shall bring, including his

own doom: “lonely in the dark. Dead and far from home”^[22]. Despite this knowledge, however, Idmon remains with the Argonauts, for unspoken reasons, perhaps because he has reached a higher stage of thought than that of his companions.

In a broader sense, theatre itself is a metaphorical inquiry into the nature of the real and the ideal^[16]. The designer/technician, the actor, and the audience member all go through Plato’s four forms of thought throughout a production. In many a theatrical production, puppetry is used to evoke imagination and belief and to question reason and understanding. German philosopher Immanuel Kant once proposed that objects are never truly experienced directly but rather only through human cognition^[16]. The puppet itself is a manmade actor: humans giving the appearance of life to that which is material^[2]. This document will examine how we find the shadows of ourselves presented in the theatre, how we find belief in the story and in the puppet—that which is so obviously material, but gives a new definition to life. Through the documentation of my process as a designer and technician in this production, I will also study how our imagination gives life to that which is lifeless and how theatre tries so desperately to impress upon its audience a new reasoning and understanding, that which Plato calls the Form of the Good.

Chapter 2

In Mythology

Beyond the story of Jason and the Argonauts, ancient mythology is ripe with journeys and quests, often beginning with dreams of fruition but ending in only tragedy and turmoil. In this chapter, I shall address two typical tropes in Greek Mythology—as well as in *Argonautika*—that can be related back to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.

The Hero’s Quest

The typical structure of the hero’s quest consists of the birth of a hero, typically a man. He is raised in poverty in a non-nuclear family and ventures forth to find himself or reclaim his birthright. He faces challenges and completes a very difficult task, often marrying a noblewoman if he succeeds^[20]. In the story of Theseus, for instance, the hero is raised far from Athens but eventually proves himself his father’s heir by ridding the highway of bandits. Similar are the stories of Perseus, Hercules, and Achilles^[7]. In all these stories, the hero grows up ignorant of reality, only seeing the world in front of him, similar to the prisoners in the cave in the first stage: imagination. He learns of his true identity/birthright and realizes the world he knew is not all that is true: belief. He journeys out into the world, similar to the prisoner leaving the cave, and begins to see the world as it is: reason. Finally, he reaches the end of his journey; he marries the noblewoman, assumes the throne, dies, or meets the gods. This symbolizes the final stage of true understanding, wherein the hero looks to the heavens and understands the greater truths of the world. In *Argonautika*, hero Jason visits his uncle, the king, knowing that his father should be the rightful ruler. He is unaware of the prophecy that names him the downfall of King Pelias.

This is the stage of imagination, where Jason does not yet know that his life can change. King Pelias offers him the crown, and Jason eagerly accepts. Now we see belief: Jason's belief that he can be the ruler of Greece. However, King Pelias tells Jason that in order to take the throne he must first prove his worth and bring back the legendary Golden Fleece from the tyrant King Aeëtes. Throughout Jason's quest, he faces many dangers and becomes a leader of men. This is the stage of reason; he is less naïve than earlier in the tale, but he is unaware of his true fate. After many trials and tribulations, Jason is successful in his quest for the fleece, but still he ends his life broken and in exile. At his final stage of thought—understanding—Jason attempts to kill himself^[22]. It should not be assumed that the meeting of this final stage of understanding will end happily, for understanding, at least in mythology, is an enlightening yet dire endeavor.

Escaping Fate

Many an ancient hero would seek a way to counter his or her fate, but always to no avail. No mortal or immortal can change that which is foretold by the three Fates: sisters Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. These deities pervade nearly all stories of Greek myth. This theme in itself brings into question the reality of free will^[20]. The heroes in question often go through all four of Plato's described forms of thought. A prophecy is presented before them; this is the shadows of what could be: imagination. They have belief that they can change it and a belief in their own free will. As the hero attempts to subvert his fate, however, he inadvertently provides the path to his fate's fulfillment. An example of this theme can be seen in Zeus's beating of Prometheus to learn the name of the mother of the child that will kill him or when the King of Thebes attempts to kill his son Oedipus, who is destined to kill him. In his attempted murder of

his son, the king brings about his own fate, when Oedipus, years later, kills him on the road thinking him a thief among a group of raiders rather than his father and the king^[7]. In *Argonautika*, there are multiple prophecies and tellings of fate. Jason, the one-sandaled man, is fated to take the throne from his uncle Pelias. Pelias attempts to divert this fate by sending Jason on what he believes to be an impossible and fatal quest. However, his success on said quest enables him to rise to the throne of Greece. Idmon sees the terrible fates of the Argo and its crew, yet he remains on the journey, whether in acceptance or an attempt to escape his own fate is unclear^[22]. These moments of realization in Greek myth often come with a slow form of understanding, wherein a character prescribes himself to the fate he is assigned. This theme is present in almost all forms of Greek tragedy. This process of a falling of hubris—from imagination, to belief, to reason, to understanding—is resonant with the themes set forth in Plato's allegory of the cave.

Chapter 3

Pre-Production of *Argonautika*

In March of 2017, I first received the script to Mary Zimmerman's *Argonautika*. Though I was aware that I was to be the puppet designer for this production, I did not yet realize the true breadth of this show and] my involvement in it. Reading the script, I was both excited and horrified. There were beautiful moments of puppetry: birds swooping over a ship upon the ocean, a sea monster rising from beneath the stage, and shadow puppets telling ancient stories. However, I was also faced with many challenges: bulls that breathe fire, a massive dragon, and a seemingly unnecessary centaur. In some areas, Zimmerman was specific with the puppets but vague in others. I questioned what was puppet, actor, or prop. I began to take notes, unsure of where this process might take me. In this chapter, I will address the pre-production stages of *Argonautika* and my design process. As a designer, this time is the beginning of my own journey through the cave: imagination and belief.

Initial Discussions

In my initial meetings with Steve Snyder, *Argonautika* director and professor with the Penn State School of Theatre, we discussed heavily the themes of the play: love and hubris, questing to save the world. These themes are discussed more in depth in Chapter 1 of this document. Outside of these themes, we talked about how *Argonautika* utilized old ways of story-telling. We agreed we wanted the visuals of the play to tell the story of the Argonauts just as

much as the words. Our first hurdle was to decide what is a puppet, both inside and outside of the words of the script. Why is a character a puppet and not an actor? Puppets themselves are arguably from a world other than our own, but how could we reflect that in this production?^[16] In many discussions with Steve Snyder, costume designer Austin Rausch, and myself, we considered this question. Eventually, we settled that the more human-like the entity, the less puppet it would be; we would reserve puppetry for those most unlike ourselves. The only exception to this rule would be the infant child. There was a purity and innocence demanded by the script that could not be provided by a human child. I will discuss this puppet in particular in Chapter 5 of this document.

When it was all settled, the puppets would be as follows: the birds, Amycus the Giant, the sea monster, the bronze bulls of Colchis, the never-sleeping dragon, the Golden Ram, the child, and shadow puppets to tell the story of Phrixus and Helle. In all of these instances, we needed to consider the visibility of the puppeteer(s). In most cases, Steve and I agreed that it was not our purpose to hide from the audience that these creatures are puppets. The puppeteers would be plainly visible, as they represent the life and the soul of the puppet^[18]. To hide the puppeteer is to distract the audience. They spend their thoughts wondering how a puppet works or what the puppeteer is doing, rather than letting the puppet lead the story. Their reason and need for understanding would overrule their ability to imagine and believe: the two forms of good arguably most important in the theatrical setting.

When discussing the movement of each of these puppets, I impressed upon Steve what I felt was the most important task for a puppet: breathing. The breath is crucial in the giving of life to a puppet^[11]. There also was the matter of what each puppet would do. In my research, it became obvious that most puppets should have one specialized movement^[21]. Though they can

have many functions, there is an art to the minimalism of puppet movement^[11]. The infant child, for example, would be specialized in walking. It had some capabilities for small arm and head movements, but these were only meant to supplement its childlike waddle. To overcomplicate a puppet is to seek disaster. Not only would it be incredibly difficult to maintain but also, again, the mysterious quality of the puppet would be lost to the audience. Similarly, the sea monster's most important movement was "swimming" (or rather a slithering like motion through the air since there was no actual water in the production). It had no mouth or eye movement, simply the twisting, snake-like motion as it moved around the stage, circling its prey. Amycus was a fighter, and so needed control over his arms and legs as a human would be but also the height and ferocity of a giant. Many of these final discoveries of movement did not come initially and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. I only use them as example to explain what Steve and I recognized would be an importance of specificity of movement. Before the final designs could be realized, I had much more research to do.

Specialized Research

I began my research exploring puppet styles and movement. I began reading many of the books cited in this thesis. Many of this beginning research would culminate into this thesis. Visually, the first thing I needed to discover was the style of the puppets. I knew there would be shadow puppetry in this production. I studied how these puppets were made and utilized in other cultures: a specific example which will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this document. In broad terms, I looked at imagery for shadow puppets in relation to how an environment, time, and mood was created.

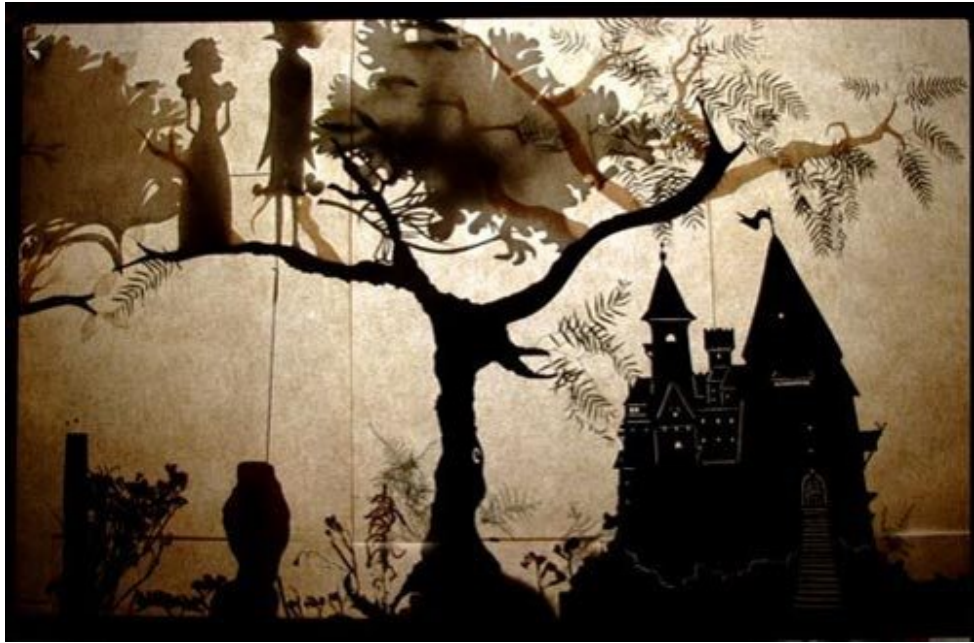


Figure 2. A modern example of shadow theatre^[15]

Though my shadow puppet imagery could not be as complicated as seen in Figure 2—due to time and spatial constraints—it was images like this that inspired my research and designs for the shadow puppets of *Argonautika*.

Eventually in my discussions with Steve, I narrowed down the styles of puppetry into three categories (not including shadow puppetry): two-dimensional style puppets, fabric or partial-dimension puppets, or three-dimensional style puppets. The first is the most childlike of styles. It is whimsical and playful, but simple. They interact well together, but less so with the human actor. In the case of this production, they were not well-suited simply for the fact that the performances would take place in the Penn State Pavilion Theatre, a thrust space with the audience surrounding the stage on three of four sides. This is not suited for the two dimensional puppet.



Figure 3. A two-dimensional style puppet from the Paperhand Puppet Intervention Show “The Living Sea of Memory in Chapel Hill, North Carolina 2009^[13]

The style I deemed fabric or partial dimension can be seen in Figure 4 and 5. These style puppets have some form of three-dimensional element, but are primarily created from fabric. This gives a very characteristically graceful motion to the puppet. Though this style puppet is quite beautiful, it was agreed the puppets of *Argonautika* must have a more raw quality to their movement. Such a harsh and human story requires equal roughness from its puppets. Though I eventually decided to utilize some of this balletic movement in the creation of the bird puppets, the primary element of the puppets of *Argonautika* needed to be more much more severe that this style would allow.



Figure 4. Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in Freemantle, Australia performs “Fox” with three-dimensional as well as fabric puppets.^[3]



Figure 5. A fabric puppet of unknown origin. Posted on Pinterest by user Erin Sackett.

The final style of puppet in my research, three-dimensional, is the most common form. Made of nearly any material, this style of puppet knows few boundaries. They are the most lifelike of the puppet styles and are capable of harnessing the most spirit. Therefore, they easily capture the imagination and belief of the audience. They can look incredibly realistic (Figure 6) or highly abstract (Figure 8). This is the direction Steve and I agreed to follow. The rough and raw quality of the puppets seen in my research was exactly what we were looking for.



Figure 6. “Michael Morpurgo’s Running Wild” UK touring production, 2017^[12]



Figure 7. Puppet from “His Dark Materials” at The Curve, 2009^[10]



Figure 8. Aslan puppet from the Off-Broadway production of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.^[11]

After settling upon a broad style of puppetry, I needed to search for specific research for each puppet. To begin this process, I needed to understand better each of the characters I was

attempting to create. I started with simple word association. I wrote “Bulls” and then started a list from there. I wrote things like “heavy,” “ferocious,” “fire,” “raging,” and “overwhelming.” I did this for each puppet, allowing me to gain insight into what emotions these creatures would need to invoke. I then looked at materials for each puppet. In my initial research, I understood that the material—both what material it looks like and what it is actually made of—needed to relate to the character^[16]. The materials must not only correspond with the spirit of the character but the need of the production. In *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, Eric Bass gives an example of material corresponding to need, saying “if the dialogue speaks of flight, can the puppets be made of stone, suggesting weight, so that our investment in the *need* for flight is enhanced?”^[16]. In my early discussions with Steve and costume designer Austin Rausch, we agreed that raw materials should be utilized for those of mortal origin, while the aesthetics of the Gods and mythical creatures would lean towards our own modern world. I continued this word association with materials in mind. For the “bulls,” I wrote “metal,” “bronze,” and “patina.” With materials and character needs in mind, my specific puppet research was much more guided.

The next step was to look at the basic structure of natural forms^[5]. Continuing with the bulls example, I researched the anatomy of a bull. I studied bull skeletons and musculature and watched videos of bulls in motion. This was meant to inform not only the structure of the bulls I would eventually build, but also the specified movements discussed earlier in this chapter. The following three figures are selected pages from my completed bulls research.



Figure 9. Argonautika Puppetry Research by Regina Joslin, page 30



Figure 10. Argonautika Puppetry Research by Regina Joslin, page 31



Figure 11. *Argonautika Puppetry Research by Regina Joslin, page 34*

I continued this process for each puppet to complete my visual research for the design stage of this production. The next logical step was to begin rough sketches of what would eventually be my final design.

Design

There is also much to be considered about the way a puppet must be viewed on stage. The puppet must dominate the space in a way an actor cannot. It is the puppet's silence that engrosses the audience. Like actors, there is a visual dramaturgy to the presence of the puppet. The space between it and other puppets, actors, and the audience can imply story and relationships^[16]. The difference, however, according to puppet-master Eric Bass, is that “when an actor comes onstage, he needs to make a statement; when the puppet comes onstage it IS a

statement”^[16]. Not only is the puppet’s distance from other performers and audience members significant, but the distance between the puppet and its puppeteer is arguably more important. Distance from the puppeteer gives a puppet autonomy, however a visible connection to the puppeteer is what gives the puppet life^[16].

It is with these thoughts and my visual research I endeavored to design the puppets of *Argonautika*. It is not the purpose of this document to explain every piece of research, artistic concept, sketch, or otherwise design decision for each puppet. This would increase the length of this document significantly while serving little purpose in the actual exploration of these designs and this production in relation to Plato’s allegory of the cave. However, in order to give clear visuals as to the process and progress of my puppet designs, the following figures shall present a selection of my personal sketches, draftings, and elevations for the puppet designs of *Argonautika*. I will say little in this chapter as to the specific processes of each design, but rather continue to focus on my overarching experience in relation to Plato’s Four Forms of Thought.

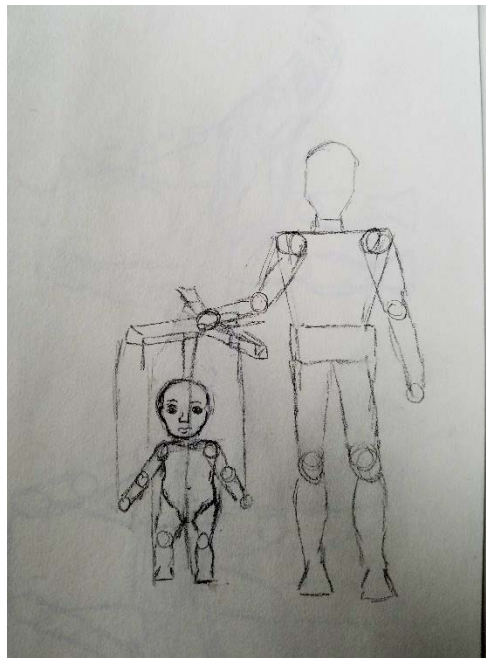


Figure 12. Rough Sketch for Infant Marionette



Figure 13. Rough Sketch for Bull Puppets

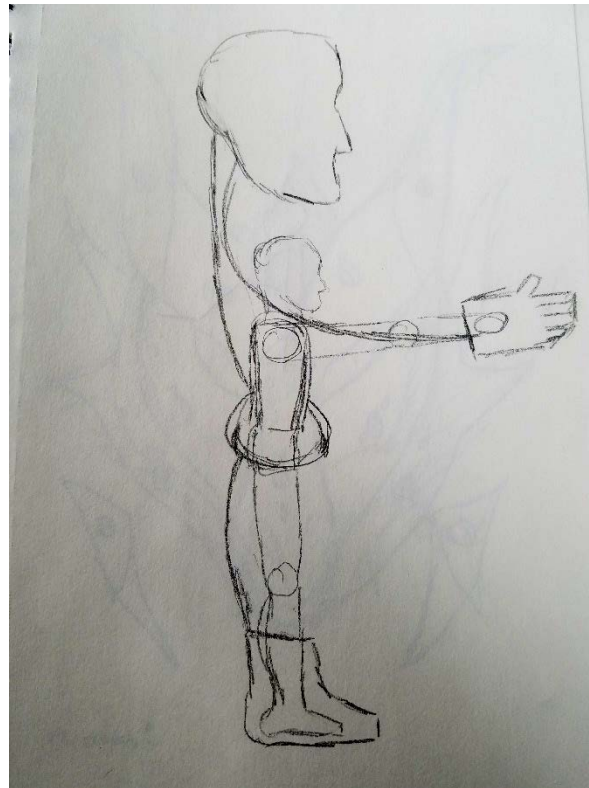


Figure 14. Rough Sketch for Amycus the Giant Puppet

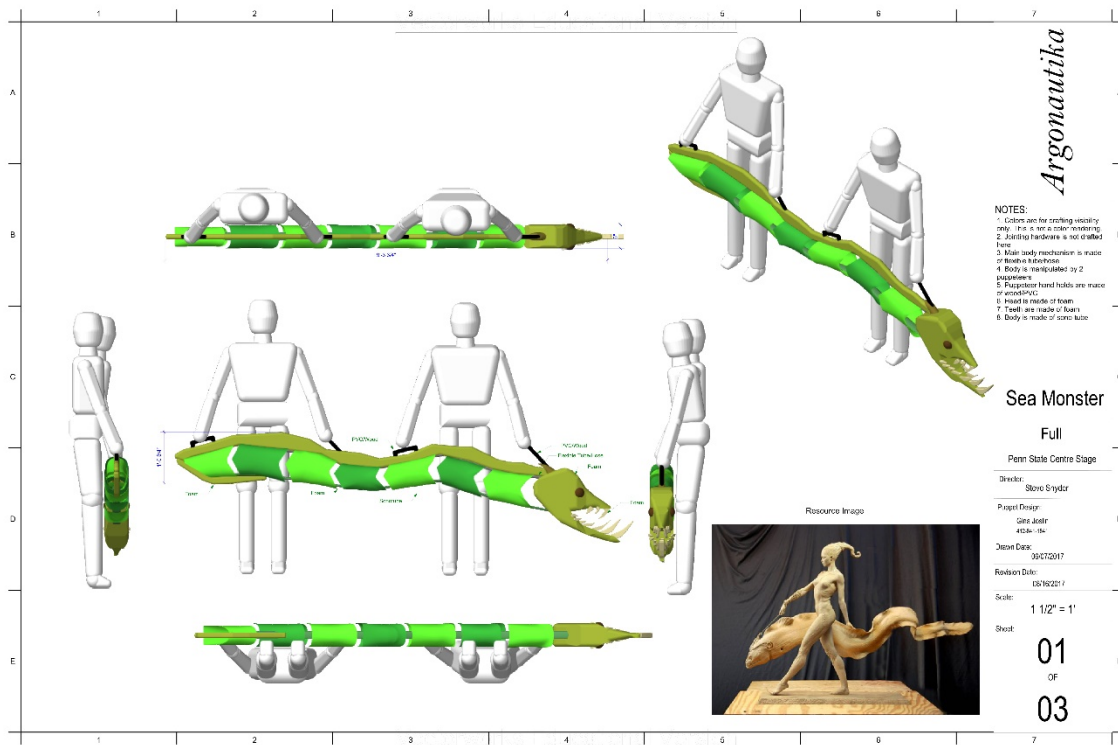


Figure 17. Sea Monster Puppet 3D Drafting

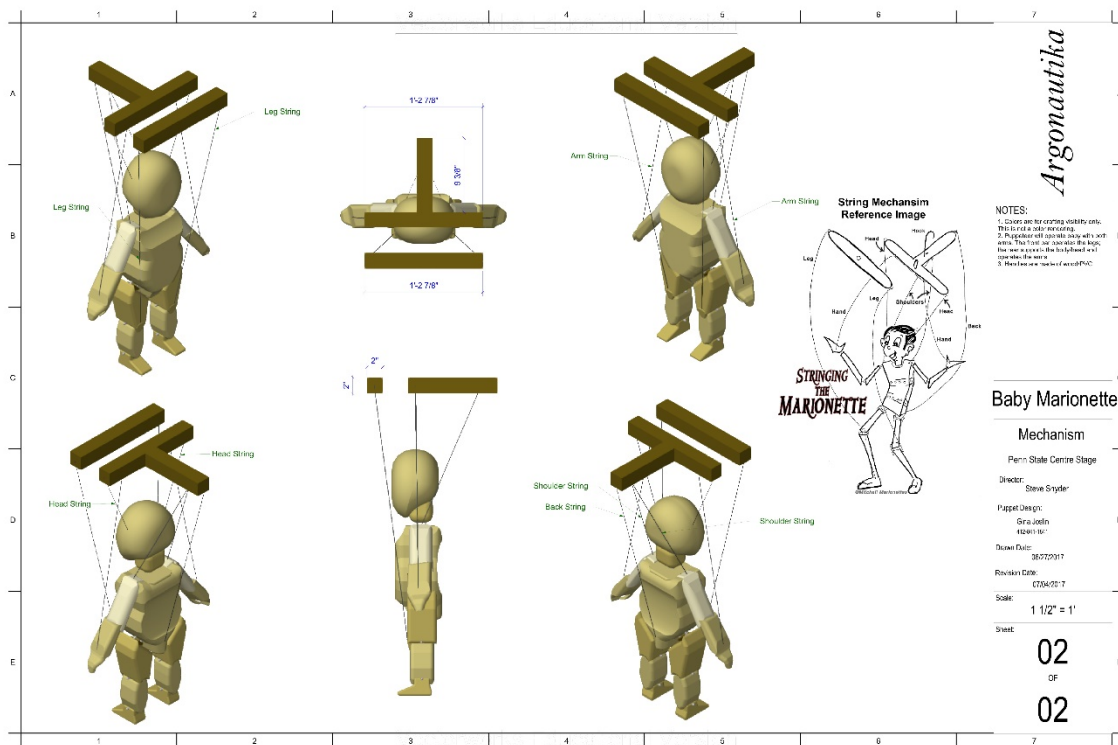


Figure 18. Infant Marionette Drafting

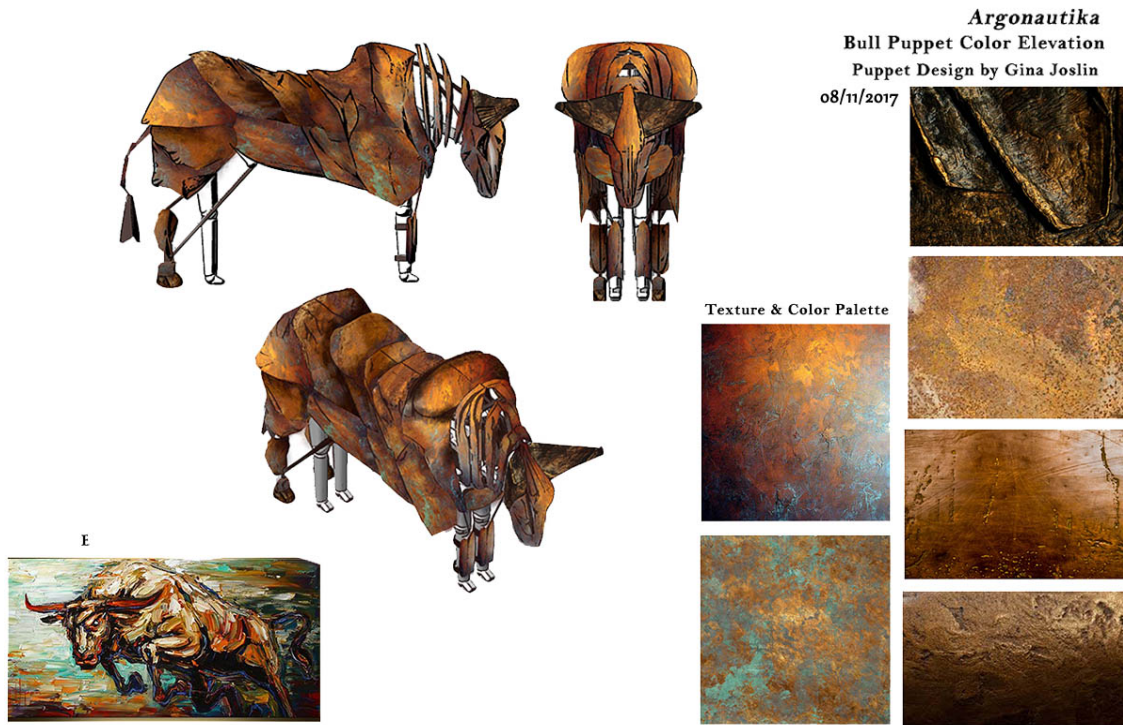


Figure 19. Bull Puppet Color Rendering



Figure 20. Dragon Puppet Color Rendering

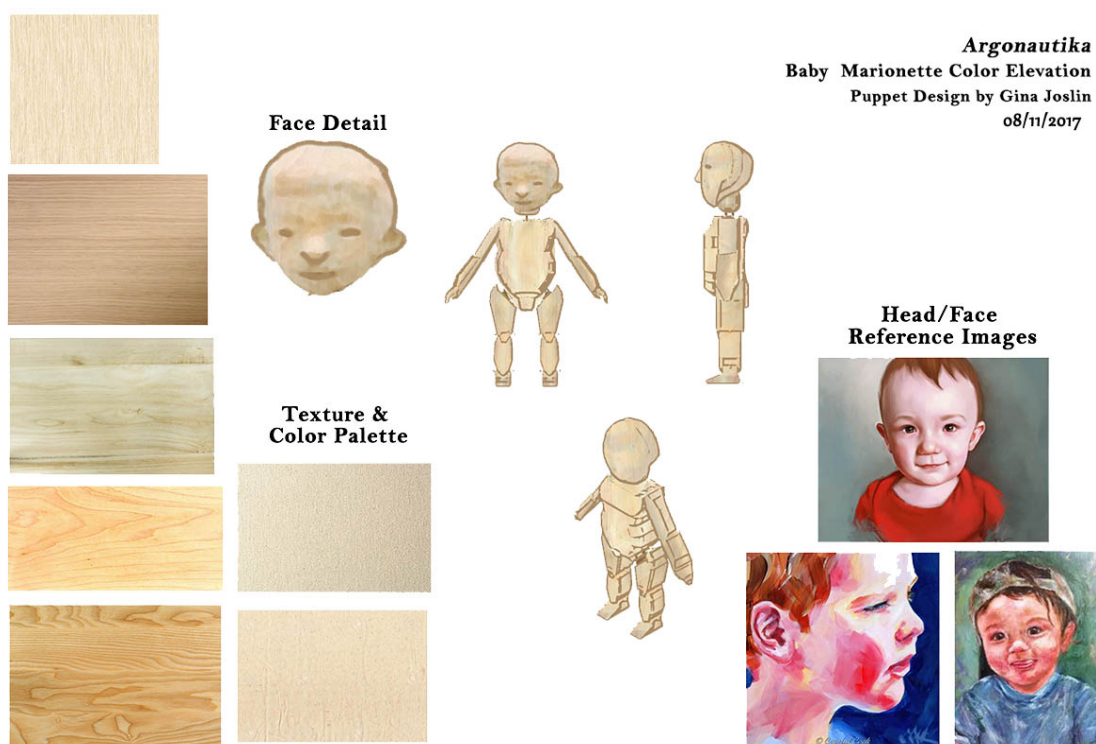


Figure 21. Infant Marionette Color Rendering



Figure 22. Amycus the Giant Puppet Color Rendering

These figures are only a small sampling of the research, sketches, drafting, and color renderings created for the puppetry of *Argonautika*. However, they establish a clear process through which the puppets were developed. These designs were all created during the pre-production period of April 2017 to July 2017. As the puppet designer and lead puppet artisan, this stage was most important for the development of the puppets as a character within the production, rather than simply that of a lifeless prop. It was through my personal process of imagination of the personalities and characteristics and belief in the life and breadth of these creatures that would bring them to the stage as fully developed puppets. These steps took time and effort; however, like the prisoners in the cave, they were mostly peaceful processes. They were solitary and calm in their growth. However, it would be the stage of reason that would build these puppets, and similar to that of the prisoner first seeing the outside of the cave, this stage would be overwhelming.

Chapter 4

Constructing *Argonautika*

It was the jump from belief to reason that I found most staggering—for reason is the stage of science, when an individual would seek to understand why things are as they are. This was the stage where I would take my designs and physically build the puppets. In March 2017 when I was first assigned this position, I was not aware I would be an integral part of this stage. I believed my involvement to be centrally located in the pre-production phase: in imagination and belief. I was comfortable as a prisoner in the cave, only seeing the light of the fire. The sun would only serve to blind me. The prisoner in Plato's story chose to leave the cave to reach the stage of reason, while my own path was thrust upon me. With great struggles and many failures, I endeavored to physically build the puppets of my own design. This was not an area with which I was familiar. I would be amiss to claim the work was completed entirely on my own, for I had two assistants: Tania Barrenechea and Roderick McCladdie-McCleod. I was also guided by the props shop manager at Penn State, Jay Lasnik.

I would ask my reader not to read too far into the metaphor here. I compare my own journey through this production not to add gravitas to my own abilities or experience, but rather to show a practical application of Plato's four forms of good. It is not for every person to escape the cave, to join the worlds of reason and understanding. This chapter will serve to explore the stage of reason in relation to the puppetry of *Argonautika*. This is not a precursor to my own path to overall enlightenment.

More simply put, this chapter shall briefly describe the build processes and challenges for each individual puppet. These explanations serve to demonstrate the stage of reason and its applications in the production of *Argonautika*. Each subchapter will be succeeded by photos

taken during the performance of *Argonautika*. This will provide the reader with a both a lexical and visual understanding of the puppetry to be later more in-depth explored and analyzed in this document.

Shadow Puppets

After discussion with director Steve Snyder, it was decided that the shadow puppets of the production would be in a style similar to ancient Greek pottery. I created many storyboards showing individual puppets and puppet movements in Adobe Photoshop (see Figure 23). Some elements—those shown in blue in my storyboards—would be projected rather than created by a physical puppet. Projections were created by Desne Wharton.



Figure 23. Shadow Puppet Storyboard

After some revisions of storyboards, I drafted each puppet in Vectorworks. From there, the puppets were cut from lauan with a CNC router, operated by Valerie Narehood. They were attached to wooden poles and painted black. Throughout the production, there were issues with

the fragility of these puppets, but they were easily repaired. Shadow puppets will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 5 of this document.



Figure 24. Production Photo from *Argonautika*, the story of the Golden Ram, shadow puppetry. Photo by Abigaile Wiker.

Golden Ram

The simplest of the physical puppets, the golden ram was carved from polystyrene and then attached to a PVC pole.



Figure 25. Progress photo, ram puppet. Photo by Regina Joslin

Fabric was glued to its body and wings for color and texture. It would spend most of the production in position in the upper stage left vom where it would 'watch' over the action of the play.



Figure 26. Progress photo, ram puppet. Photo by Jay Lasnik.



Figure 27. Progress photo, ram puppet. Photo by Jay Lasnik.



Figure 28. Production photo, ram puppet. Photo by Regina Joslin

Birds

The bird puppets were designed as gliding sea birds with a limited range of motion. The first design was smaller, approximately 3 feet in length, with a moving head. The second was approximately 10 feet in length, to be glided over the heads of the audience. The birds were carved from polystyrene and attached to fiberglass rods. The fiberglass was chosen due to its durability and flexibility, giving the puppeteers control while still giving the puppet itself a natural movement.



Figure 29. Progress photo, bird puppet. Photo by Roderick McCladdie-McCleod.

The head of the smaller puppets were attached via a small spring, and an aluminum rod was added to manipulate the head. The puppets were then papier-mâchéd to increase durability. They were then wrapped in white fabric for color and texture. Some of this fabric was loosely applied to the puppet to give an appearance of feathers fluttering in the wind.



Figure 30. Production Photo from *Argonautika*, bird puppets. Photo by Regina Joslin



Figure 31. Production Photo from *Argonautika*, bird puppets. Photo by Regina Joslin

Marionette

Early in pre-production, we decided that Jason's baby brother would be represented by a marionette. The rationale behind this decision will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 5 of this document. For this chapter, however, it is prudent to explain the process in which this puppet was built. My assistant Tania Barrenechea carved the majority of the puppet's body from polystyrene.



Figure 32. Progress photo, marionette. Photo by Jay Lasnik

His upper arms were created with sewn muslin stuffed with brown craft paper, to create a lighter, more flexible movement. The joints of the puppet were intersected with bolts, while the string attachments were made with small eyelets. This consisted of ankle, knee, hip, elbow, shoulder, and neck joints. It was then painted to appear as unfinished wood.

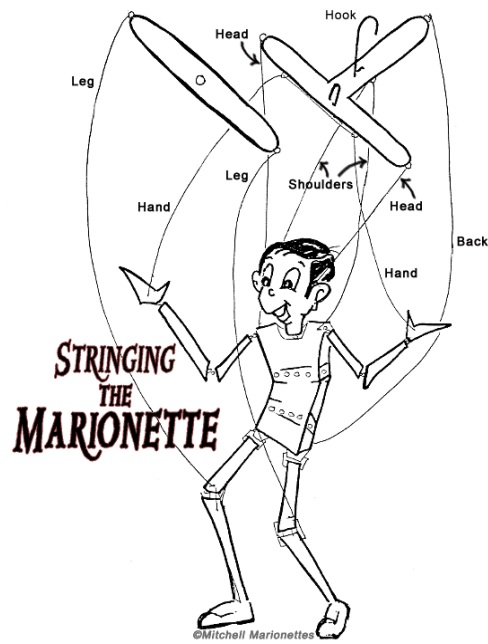


Figure 33. “Stringing the Marionette” reference^[17]



Figure 34. Progress Photo, marionette. Photo by Jay Lasnik



Figure 35. Production Photo from *Argonautika*, marionette. Photo by Regina Joslin.

Amycus the Giant

Amycus the Giant was built to be worn on the shoulders of the puppeteer. The main structure consisted of an aluminum camping backpack bolted to PVC to support the head of the puppet. This head was sculpted with chicken wire and polystyrene and then papier-mâchéd for durability. His hair was glued on pieces of brown craft paper.



Figure 36. Progress photo, giant puppet. Photo by Jay Lasnik

In the original design, the arms and feet were attached to the main structure via vinyl strips, however, as the puppet was built, these additions were determined to be unnecessary and limited the movement of the puppeteer. The final hands were gardening gloves and the feet were rubber galoshes, both sculpted over with upholstery foam, and papier-mâchéd with muslin.



Figure 37. Progress photo, giant puppet with puppeteer Johnathon Hashmonay. Photo by Tania Barrenechea
All of the pieces were painted to appear as old, dark wood, and hemp rope was added to bring a cohesiveness to the separate parts while hiding the joints in the PVC structure.



Figure 38. Progress photo, giant puppet. Photo by Jay Lasnik



Figure 39. Production photo from *Argonautika*, Amycus the Giant. Photo by Regina Joslin.

Sea Monster

The sea monster puppet was designed to be controlled by two puppeteers, ‘swimming’ in a snake or eel-like motion. This was created by building a segmented body made from sonotube, joined with nylon strips. The head and fin were built from sculpted foam. All pieces were papier-mâché.



Figure 40. Progress photo, sea monster. Photo by Jay Lasnik.

The puppet was painted to give the appearance of metal covered in patina and algae. As one of the first puppets to be built and hence to be brought into rehearsal, this document shall discuss the sea monster again in Chapter 6.



Figure 41. Progress photo, sea monster. Photo by Regina Joslin.



Figure 42. Production photo from *Argonautika*, sea monster puppet. Photo by Regina Joslin.

Bulls

The bull puppets were the most complicated to build. On the interior of the puppet were two puppeteers wearing aluminum backpacks, similar to that used for Amycus the Giant. Bolted to the aluminum were two bent PVC frames, similarly attached to a PVC spine. From this, aluminum strips would create a cage-like structure. This would be the skeleton of the bull. The joints in the back leg were created with toggle bolts. The puppeteer at the rear of the bull would manipulate the head and neck while the hind puppeteer would control the back legs. The hooves were carved polystyrene.



Figure 43. Progress photo, bull skeleton frame. Photo by Regina Joslin

The exoskeleton of the bulls was built with cardboard, cut and pop-riveted in a manner to give the appearance of a suit of armor. This was then wrapped and papier-mâchéd.



Figure 44. Progress photo, bull puppet. Photo by jay Lasnik.

It was painted in accordance with my color renderings. However, when the finished puppet reached rehearsal, it became clear the exoskeleton made the puppet too heavy for the puppeteers to carry. After some redesigning, it was decided a majority of the bull's lower abdomen would be cut. This would lighten the puppet for the actors, as well as give the puppet a more abstract look.



Figure 45. Progress photo, bull puppet. Photo by Jay Lasnik

There also was the challenge of where these puppets would be stored backstage. Because of their sheer mass, it became necessary to rig them to fly, so that they could be stored out of the way in the air.



Figure 46. Panorama photo, bull puppets. Photo by Jay Lasnik.



Figure 47. Production photo from *Argonautika*, bull puppets. Photo by Regina Joslin

Dragon

The dragon was designed as eight separate pieces which would come together in the dark to form the face of a massive dragon. These dragon pieces would be built almost entirely by Tania Barreanchea. Constructed entirely with gatorboard and cardboard, this sculpture would reach a height of fourteen feet tall when standing.



Figure 48. Progress photo, dragon nose. Photo by Jay Lasnik.



Figure 49. Progress photo, dragon eyes. Photo by Jay Lasnik

After construction, it would be papier-mâché and painted. Handles would be added on the back for the puppeteers to hold.



Figure 50. Progress photo, dragon puppet. Photo by Regina Joslin



Figure 51. Progress photo, dragon puppet. Photo by Jay Lasnik



Figure 52. Production photo, dragon puppet. Photo by Regina Joslin

The build process for these puppets began August 16, 2018 and did not officially end until tech rehearsals began October 16, 2018. They were mainly constructed by Tania Barrenechea, Roderick McCladdie-McCleod, and myself. Over the three months, I personally worked 309 hours in the shop. This does not include time spent designing, in meetings, or in rehearsals. The build was the most arduous process of this production. It would also be the stage developed almost entirely by reason and practical thinking. Though the specifics of each individual construction may not be relevant to the overall premise of this document, it is necessary to give some brief overview so that the overall complexity of this stage of reason can be understood.

Chapter 5

World-Building

In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato proposes the allegory of the cave to explain not only four ways of thought, but also four ways of life: imagination, belief, reason, and understanding. Puppets, specifically, relate to the world proposed in the allegory of the cave. They are something outside of our reality. They evoke both imagination and belief. They question our reason and understanding.

This play was designed for puppetry. *Argonautika* is filled with moments where reality, history, and imagination meet. Puppets cross between worlds: that of the real and unreal, the living and the dead. These lifeless objects are prone to metamorphosis. Birth and death is fluid for the puppet, yet they can never quite reach either. Though they cannot truly come to life, they also can never entirely die. A puppet cannot be dead until its body has entirely disappeared, for every fragment holds the potential for life. We relate to the puppets; we see in them a mirror of ourselves. They are material, animal, and human all at once. This chapter will explore this cross-section between allegory of the cave, puppetry, and *Argonautika*.

Shadow Puppetry

To make an even more direct connection to that of the allegory of the cave, the production of *Argonautika* included the use of shadow puppets—previously discussed in Chapter 4 of this document—like those that taunt the prisoners in the cave. These shadows tell the story

of Phryxus and Helle, who rode off on the Golden Ram to escape their fate. In many traditions, the shadow puppet theatre “may take place in a world of fantasy where no laws of gravity or spatial relationships apply”^[2]. Balinese *Wayang Kulit*, a traditional form of shadow puppet theatre in Indonesia, is one of the most ancient forms of shadow puppet theatre^[8]. The shadow puppet theatre in Bali is considered even to this day a religious custom and social event. Balinese religion is based on the balance between negative and positive forces in the universe and that these forces are contained and controlled through human intervention such as ritual^[8]. It is consistent then that one of their most honored traditions would utilize light and shadow, as well as puppets, often considered to exist somewhere between life and death. These puppets are crafted from buffalo hide and mounted on bamboo sticks^[16]. This would explain why *wayang kulit* directly translates to ‘shadows of leather’^[8].

One of the most ancient records of Balinese *wayang* calls the puppet master *dalang* or “the mover of the world”^[8]. Indeed, this is true, for the puppet master controls the eyes and ears of the audience as well as the puppet. Like the men on the wall behind the prisoners, the puppet master creates a new reality for his audience, one that they have no choice but to believe. In the case of *Argonautika*, it is the puppeteer that has this direct interaction with the audience, but on a broader scale, the puppet master, or puppet designer, is equally if not more responsible for this creation of a new reality. The audience are the prisoners in the cave. Their imagination brings final life to that which the puppet designer creates, yet it will fall on them to bring reason and understanding to the performance and with them after they have left the theatre. The performer/designer can only hope to push the audience in this direction despite what the action of the play may impart. This document will discuss in greater depth the journey of the audience member through Plato’s four forms of good in Chapter 6.

Théâtre d'objets

The 1980s saw the rise of the *théâtre d'objets* in Europe: a theatrical performance that animates everyday objects. This is not to be confused with Frank Proschan's essay from the time categorizing 'performing objects': "material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance"^[16]. Proschan's 'performing objects' is centered on objects that were designed with performance in mind, while 'theatre of objects' was originally defined to be everyday objects utilized for performance but not crafted for that purpose. Today these two terms are often used interchangeably, and many practitioners and puppetry scholars consider any object that is given independent life in performance to be a performing object^[16].

According to the stated definitions, the puppets in *Argonautika* are performing objects, designed with the purpose of performance. This concept of the theatre of objects, however, is extremely interesting in the context of this document. To give an example of a theatre of objects, imagine the stereotypical boxed hand puppet theatre. However, instead of gloved hands acting out the scene, a fork and a spoon rise from beneath the 'stage.' The silverware bounces along to walk, human voices act as the voices of the objects, and perhaps at the end of the play the fork and spoon lean forward and touch faces, emulating a kiss. These objects were not created for the performance, and yet they are given life by the puppeteer behind the screen. The audience is able to accept this scenario easily; their imagination easily adapts to the supposed life given to these inanimate objects. The story itself is a mirror of that which occurs in reality: the fork and spoon version of *Romeo & Juliet*. The audience is able to believe in the story because it is a shadow of our own lives. The audience member knows this is a fork and a spoon, there are unseen puppeteers controlling the action, and that the performance itself is just a story, however, as it is

with all theatre, the audience will briefly believe in the life of these performers, or in this case, material objects. Theatre, even that created with the simplest of materials, can make the audience member question their own reason. They know that the fork and spoon are inanimate objects, and yet there is a moment where puppetry can make an audience question whether the object is alive or dead^[16]. This questioning will lead into the following subchapter with an exploration of the death of the puppet.

Death of the Puppet

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, it was decided that Jason's infant brother in *Argonautika* would be played by a marionette. The script, however, describes this character very differently. In the beginning of the scene Visitation, the stage directions state, "a little puppet child, floats in from above. [Jason's mother] catches him and lays him on the ground. His arms and legs move slightly throughout the scene"^[22]. From this moment, the baby is meant to have little action or impact in the scene. He wiggles throughout, and is somewhat anticlimactically murdered alongside his parents. Director Steve Snyder and I, however, recognized a potential in this moment to create something more powerful. With a marionette of an infant or toddler rather than a baby, we could strengthen this child's connection to the world of the living. The marionette would waddle back towards its parents when set aside and lift its arms in gesture to be held. We could create a life and character in this silent but animate child. Eventually, when his parents would die, the puppet could hover between the lifeless bodies of its parents. The stillness of the puppet could show its confusion and sadness. After this moment of heart-breaking silence, it was scripted for the child also to die.



Figure 53. Production photo from *Argonautika*, the death of Jason's parents. Photo by Regina Joslin

Some puppetry practitioners have claimed that the puppet must be destroyed to be truly dead in the eyes in the audience^[16]. A few believe in the total destruction either through fire or total obliteration, yet others will accept simpler methods. Rather than a complete physical destruction, the destruction of its mechanism for movement—that which gives the most life to the puppet—will suffice. It is an old metaphor, practically a cliché, to cut the strings of a marionette to symbolize its death^[16]. However, for a play so enriched with ancient history and metaphor, the ‘old way’ felt a fitting method to kill our marionette. The child’s strings would be cut in three vicious swipes, so that its death could be an even more devastating blow to those who had begun to believe in the life of this child.

The puppet as a whole, however, is known to die gracefully. This is done when the manipulator leaves the puppet, emulating the ‘soul’ leaving the body. This movement is always “beautiful: simple, understated, and respectful”^[11]. When our marionette’s strings were cut, there was a moment of silence, wherein the puppeteer stared silently at the child’s broken form. She then slowly turned and walked off stage, giving the death a moment of grace yet finality. It is clear with the departure of the soul, the life of the puppet is truly lost. This moment of death is where the audience can truly see the difference between the animated and the unanimated figure. The materialness of the puppet is revealed. The audience must come to reason; the child they felt the life of was always an inanimate object. This broken pile of foam and wood, that they imagined the life of and believed in was never real. There is a moment within the audience’s minds of reality versus unreality. This is the prisoners leaving the cave and being blinded by the sun. A puppet can evoke imagination and belief, but reason can upset the balance within the cave.

Chapter 6

Ruminations

The actor and the audience take for granted the bringing of life to a play. Life is obvious and does not need to be performed. The puppet, however, is lifeless, and therefore its main act is this performance of life^[16]. The puppet is able to come to life through the transference of the performer's energy^[6]. This can be a very delicate process. If the puppeteer begins to 'act' the puppet will die, becoming a prop^[6]. They must instead project into the puppet, taking great care at every moment^[6,17]. The designer also is responsible for the life of the puppet. The designer's job is to decide what movements and aesthetics gives the most life. Jointing and structure all give specific forms of expressiveness, while color and texture can create depth and spirit for the puppet^[16]. The audience will take the puppet seriously so long as they believe in its life^[16]. As stated in the *Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*,

[The puppet is constantly] engaged in a parallel, low key drama: a life or death struggle, dependent on the puppeteer's strength, stamina, muscle memory, and of course artistry or talent... There is always suspense in live puppetry, because both the audience and the puppeteers know what the puppet does not^[16].

This chapter will be a final reflection on how the actor, the audience, and the designer relate to the puppet and its constant struggle for life.

Actor Experiences

Performing as a puppeteer is largely a matter of technique as well as an art^[21]. It is a fragile endeavor, and for teams of puppeteers especially, it relies on the actor's commitment and willingness to support one another. During the production of *Argonautika*, I was heavily involved in the rehearsal process. Steve and I agreed early on that when the artisan team finished with the structure of a puppet it would be sent on to rehearsal. We would then reclaim it later to finish painting and rendering the puppet. This gave the puppeteers the ability to work with their puppet early on in the rehearsal process. At these beginning stages, Steve would allow the puppeteers and me to move to a separate rehearsal room. Here the actors would be allowed to simply 'play' with the puppet. This was a time to make discoveries and gain fresh ideas about movement^[2]. I was there simply to give suggestions and make sure they were working with the puppet and the puppet was working for them in a safe way. It was also helpful at this time for the puppeteers to work in front of a mirror. This let them see themselves and the puppet from an audience perspective. After this was done, now that they understood how the puppet moved and operated, they would rejoin the rest of the cast and learn the staging of their scene.

In my personal experience in these rehearsals, I found it incredibly fascinating working with and watching the puppeteers interact with each other and their puppet. For the puppets that required two performers, the actors had to learn to be aware of what the other was doing at all times. They needed to coordinate with each other every step and movement. In the case of the bulls, the puppeteer at the heart of the puppet could not see their hind puppeteer, while the hind puppeteer could only see the heart but not the world around them. There was a lot of trust needed in these situations.

The performers also learned quickly how small movements of the puppet can carry a great deal of meaning^[11]. In rehearsal with the marionette, the puppeteer began to manipulate the strings outside the normal parameters attached to the wooden handles. Here, she discovered how to slowly raise the puppet's arms in a delicate, childlike motion, giving the puppet even more movement than I had planned. It became important to me, to let the actors discover the manipulation of the puppet on their own. I could tell them where to put their hands and give them the beginnings of the functionality, but it was their experimentation and private discoveries that would connect them physically and mentally with their puppet.

It was especially interesting to observe how quickly the puppeteers created a personal relationship with their puppet. Puppets were named and assigned genders, from Alpha the bull to Brad the marionette child. The sea monster in particular had the most profound effect on its puppeteers. In 'play' rehearsal, the puppeteers argued over names, finally settling on Guinevere, and gave the puppet a long backstory, including her political stances, a past love life, and an awakening into her sexuality. The puppeteers laid on the floor beside the puppet discussing this, sometimes draping an arm over Guinevere's body as if to feel more connected to her. Some of the performers truly fell in love with their puppet, with the character and life they were creating. During a pause of a tech rehearsal, the marionette puppeteer lifted the limp child into her arms and held it as a mother would. She felt a human connection to this puppet in a way that one does not often feel if an object is truly inanimate.



Figure 54. *Argonautika* rehearsal, sea monster puppeteers lay down beside the puppet, deciding an in-depth backstory for the creature.



Figure 55. *Argonautika* tech rehearsal, marionette puppeteer embraces her puppet

It was exciting to see, in my experience observing and working with the puppeteers for this play, the performers truly give their imagination over to the life of their puppet and easily believe in its vitality. To most of them, this was not just a prop, but a new life they were responsible for creating.

Audience Observations

During any theatrical performance, but especially where puppetry is involved, the audience's imagination joins with that of the performers^[2]. The audience completes the circle; they are both within and outside of the story of the play. They are most able to pass through all of Plato's four stages of thought. The performance is "an act of communication between performers and an audience"^[2]. The audience uses their imagination to fill in the gaps of the story^[11]. They become invested in its characters and plot; they must believe in the truth of the story. There is always a shared desire between the actor and the audience to believe in the life of the puppet^[11]. In puppet theory, there is a concept called double-vision^[19]. This is when the audience is able to perceive a puppet both as the perceived object and as imagined life. They experience deceptive empathy. The audience feels an emotional connection to the puppet. As Penny Francis writes, "empathy assumes feeling in the recipient. The puppet only mimics feeling through attitude and movement"^[6]. The puppet is meant to act as an outline for the audience to fill with their own projected fantasy: what they imagine to be the reality of the play^[6]. Exemplified in the infant marionette's childlike, wobbling walk, these micromovements most genuinely connect with an audience. The puppet is a manifestation of our own struggle, to act, to live, to be human. These small moments are what allow the audience to project human attributes onto the

non-human entity that is the puppet^[18]. In her book focusing on the *Handspring Puppet Company*, Jane Taylor writes,

the puppet is an infant who relies on another's recognition of its humanity in order to survive. It cannot exist without us and, if it is to live, must manage to persuade us to believe in its potentiality.^[18]

In this way, the audience is capable of seeing falsehoods as well as truths. When a puppet does not convince them of its life, they will immediately recognize its inanimateness. Similarly, if the story fails to interest the audience, reality will penetrate the theatre. This is one way that an audience can come to reason. Preferably, however, an audience will come to reason after the performance. When the story or the puppet truly captures an audience's imagination and belief, their reason will return when the curtain closes. They recognize not only the falseness of the story, but more importantly the message the story was attempting to impart. They will come to the understanding that every story, every play, every puppet is but a shadow of ourselves and our own reflected reality.

Not only can puppets be seen as a metaphor for ourselves and our humanity, it may also be a metaphor for an even larger concept. The performer manipulates and controls the puppet, and the puppet has no choice but to bend to their will. Steve Tillis in his book *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet: Puppetry as a Theatrical Art* compared this puppet/puppeteer relationship to that of a human/deity relationship. There are many cultures that believe in one or more powerful entities that control the path of humanity. Tillis specifically refers to Aristotle's explanation of the gods' control over the universe where "he says of the Prime Mover:

‘All that is necessary is an act of will—the same as that which controls the marionettes by pulling a string to move the heads or the hands of these little beings, then their shoulders, their eyes, and sometimes all of the parts of their bodies, which respond with grace.’”^[19]

Aristotle recognized the connection between puppets and humanity. Perhaps they are a reflection of ourselves more than we are able to understand. This connection with the puppet will often cause an audience’s understanding of what is real and what is not to be confused. It brings about the question of who truly is in control: the puppet or the puppeteer, themselves or something larger?^[19]

Designer Reflections

I began the design process of this show nearly a year ago to when I write this document—March 2018. From initial readings to actor rehearsals and final build processes, the growth and life of these puppets was primarily my responsibility. My initial research and design gave them realism and function; my labor and words gave them physicality. It was also, my responsibility to pass the show over to the performers, to entrust them with the story-telling^[11]. This was my own passage into the phase of understanding. Imagination and belief came early in the design process, reason in the build and rehearsal process, but it was not till it came time for me to step away from the project and reflect that I could truly understand the life of these puppets. This thesis is in itself a documentation of my journey to this phase. Understanding has allowed me to ruminate on the actors’, the audience’s, and my own experiences with this play.

We find the shadows of ourselves presented in the theatre. Our imagination gives life to that which is lifeless. We find belief in the story and in the puppet. Theatre in all forms attempts

to impress upon its audience—and even its participants—a new reasoning and understanding of the world. In the allegory of the cave, the prisoner journeyed from an insignificant life staring at shadows. This stage of imagination is comprised of guesses, images, stories, and opinions. It is powerful and entrapping. How often do we get lost in our own imaginations? Puppetry and theatre are one of the purest representations of this stage, for they are made of and rely on imagination. It is our imagination that gives theatre and puppetry life. Plato's message, however, is that to live in a life illuminated only by imagination is to live in a world of falsehoods.

When the prisoner turned around to see the light of the fire, they saw the falsity of the shadows, however they still do not realize there is a world outside of the cave. This is belief: the stage of practical common sense, of trial and error. We believe strongly and whole-heartedly, perhaps to our own devastation at times. Theatre can give voice and physicality to belief, to what we believe is the truth of the world. The audience may believe in the life of the puppet, in its humanity, yet this belief is not to be confused with its reality, its ultimate inanimate quality. It is human to cling to our beliefs, yet Plato believes that to remain only in this second stage is to live but half a life.

The prisoner is then dragged from the cave to the bright light of the outside where he can finally see real objects and life. This is the stage of cognitive thought and reason. This is the 'scientific stage,' when the individual seeks to understand why things are as they are. This is the phase where theatre often leaves its audience to its own devices. Theatre portrays a message, an idea. It asks its audience to think, to find some greater meaning. What is the truer purpose of the puppet? What can it represent and create that an actor or a prop cannot? Humanity is constantly in search of this scientific understanding. We study physics, biology, and astronomy, to name a

few, all in deference to this stage of reason. We seek truth beyond what our beliefs and imagination may be.

Lastly, the prisoner looks to the sun and the heavens and begins to understand the cause for everything he sees. This is the fourth and final form: understanding. . The stage of understanding represents the philosophical approach. Theories themselves are evaluated which leads to what Plato calls 'true understanding.' Theatre and puppetry are but a reflection of ourselves, a shadow of our reality. Perhaps in this exaggerated form, it is easier for us to recognize our own struggles and faults. Does the death of the puppet represent the death of our imagination or perhaps our own physical death? There are many metaphors to be explored when it comes to the relationship between the puppet and the human, only a few of which could be explored in this document. Theatre leaves its audience to explore, to find reason and come to understanding. True understanding cannot be taught or written in a thesis, it must be found. I do not claim to have found it, for how can you ever claim to understand that which is ever-changing? Yet this is where I choose to leave my readers, in this place between reason and understanding. This document has explored *Argonautika* and puppetry as a modern yet ancient commentary on Plato's Theory of Forms. The reader must come to their own understanding about how puppetry can relate to their own life. I have written in these pages my own thoughts and theories, as well as those I have found in my research, but the understanding of these concepts cannot be forced, but must be dwelled upon after my words have ended.

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