



Jan Klaassen on a string

Jan Klaassen is well-known in the Netherlands as the roguish ‘principal man’ in traditional Dutch puppet theatre. Generally speaking, Jan Klaassen is a hand puppet, just like *Punch* in English puppet theatre. During the eighteenth, nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, however, Jan Klaassen puppet plays were also performed with *marionettes*. Puppet theatre was for the poor, while marionette theatre was for the rich. Because they hang on *strings*, marionettes move much more slowly than hand puppets.

They are also unable to land a hefty punch. But they do have other possibilities: they can fly through the air, for instance, and some marionettes are specially made to enable them to perform spectacular tricks.

Marionettes

This adaptation for effect was also found in the ‘Jan Klaassen marionette plays’, as can be read in *Doopceel van Jan Claeszen - Kroniek van het traditionele poppenspel in Nederland* (1969), a history of traditional puppet theatre in the Netherlands written by the teacher, puppeteer and puppet theatre author *Wim Meilink*. In his book, Meilink describes the normal nineteenth century marionette programme. The story is ‘told’ by Louis Verhoeven who, up to the age of about 16, assisted his father A. Verhoeven Sr. (†1898), one of the best-known Jan Klaassen puppeteers of the day. Slightly later came Janus Cabalt (1869-1935). He, too, brought Jan Klaassen to life both as a puppet and a marionette. Puppets and theatres made and used by Cabalt have been preserved. The marionettes now form part of the collection of the Dutch Theatre Institute (TIN), while the hand puppets can be seen in Amsterdam’s Historical Museum.

Comic strip

Verhoeven’s sketches and Cabalt’s marionettes, together with a video film made by the TIN in 1986 which shows puppeteers Feike Boschma and Wim Kerkhove manipulating Cabalt’s puppets, inspired author *Hetty Paërl* to make a *comic strip* starring Jan Klaassen as a marionette. She created two versions: one in Indian ink for *Popellum* – a magazine about folk puppet theatre world-wide – and one in acrylics for the *Puppetry Museum*. We have now published this colour comic strip as a *poster*.

Puppetry Information Centre

Would you like to know more about *Jan Klaassen* and his wife *Katrijn* (the Dutch equivalents of *Mr Punch* and *Judy*), the French *Polichinelle*, the German *Kasperl* and their common forefather, the Italian *Pulcinella*? Or about *Pierrot*, *Death* and trick and metamorphic figures from folk puppet theatre? Then take a look in our Dutch-language *ABC of Puppetry* or in our international *library*, which now contains over seven thousand works and visit our four-language website at www.poppenspelmuseum.nl.

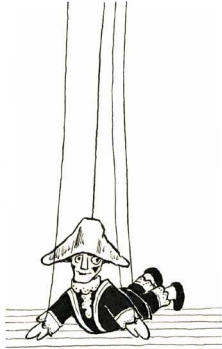
In the *Puppetry Museum Shop* you will find other articles created by Hetty Paërl, besides the comic strip, e.g. a poster showing traditional Dutch puppetry scenes, a board game called *Jan z’n ganzenbord* (a variation on a traditional Dutch board game for all the family), a *Happy Families card game* based on puppetry themes, with two extra *devil cards* as jokers. The card game also includes a booklet with information about the various characters, the different puppetry techniques and also a set of rules and instructions. The cards from this set are also shown on the *Puppetry Museum Happy Families poster*. Other items which Hetty Paërl has created exclusively for the Museum, available from the shop, are illustrations of gluttons and drinkers from among the characters of puppet theatre (colourful placemat) and various postcards. Also available is *Heerekrintjes*, a Dutch-language book about Jan Klaassen, Katrijn and their foreign counterparts.

□ Scenes from traditional puppet theatre

The following six traditional Dutch puppet theatre scenes are illustrated on both the comic strip and the poster.

Scene 1: Jan Klaassen, Katrijn and their children

Jan Klaassen enters only for his wife Katrijn to tell him to look after the children. They start to bawl and he kicks them out of the way.



Scene 2: Jan Klaassen, Katrijn, the landlord and Pierrot

The landlord comes to collect the rent. Jan Klaassen disappears down to the pub. Katrijn doesn't know what to do, for she has no money. Pierrot, the son of Jan Klaassen and Katrijn, sets fire to the landlord's wig.

Scene 3: Jan Klaassen and the butterflies

Jan Klaassen – back from the pub – sleeps off his hangover. He is pestered by butterflies and chases them away.

Scene 4: Jan Klaassen and the long-short man

A short, fat chappie comes on stage, and he gets taller and taller. Jan takes a ride on his neck and calls him his 'personal dromedary'. This figure – a trick puppet – is the 'long-short man'.

Scene 5: Jan Klaassen, Katrijn and Death

A very pale figure enters. Jan Klaassen tells Katrijn that this is her uncle from the Dutch East Indies (a former colony), and that she should give him a kiss. But the pale visitor is however Death, and he wants to embrace Katrijn. Jan Klaassen kicks him away.

Scene 6: Jan Klaassen and Fat Jane

At the end of the play, Fat Jane appears as a flower girl – this is one of the metamorphic puppets: a flat, jointed cardboard figure which changes shape as certain parts of the puppet are folded in or out. When Jan Klaassen tries to kiss her, she flips her wide skirt up and changes into a hot air balloon. Jan floats up into the sky with her, but is soon falling back to earth. He calls out in a thick Amsterdam accent: "It's too beautiful up there for me!"

□ *Illustration: final scene 'Jan aan touwtjes' (Jan on a string) from Hetty Paërl's comic strip (2002/2003). Appendix: Puppet Pamphlet 68e, poster.*

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