

Editorial : Ghost hunting (A letter from Milan)

In Italy, archives, museums and libraries preserve hundreds of manuscripts by puppeteers who, sometimes over several generations, have accumulated, copied, annotated and modified them. Opening these *copioni*, turning their pages, for example in the library of the Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi in Milan, the school of dramatic art founded in 1951 by Giorgio Strehler and Paolo Grassi, brings to light the names of Gianduja, Sandrone or Fasolino, of course, but also those of Facanappa, Sganapino, Gerolamo, Baciccia, Barudda, Famiola...

Sitting on the terrace of a Milanese café, protected from the sun that has been burning Northern Italy for four months and drying out the riverbeds, I think of all those “masks”, each with their own local language, morphology, costume and character, who seem like so many ghosts fleeing in the shadows of the arcades. Who remembers their names? Who would be able to recognize them? Many of them disappeared after the two World Wars, along with the “fireflies” of regional and popular cultures that Pasolini saw dying.

But if their names have faded, what they told remains. Their shifted view of events in which they were more often the witnesses than the protagonists, their comic diversions, their cheeky slip-ups, their biting irony continue to be heard in the rustle of voices and bursts of laughter: these are positions of thought, figures of language that run through the beautiful calligraphy of the puppeteers' *copioni* and the conversations of today as well.

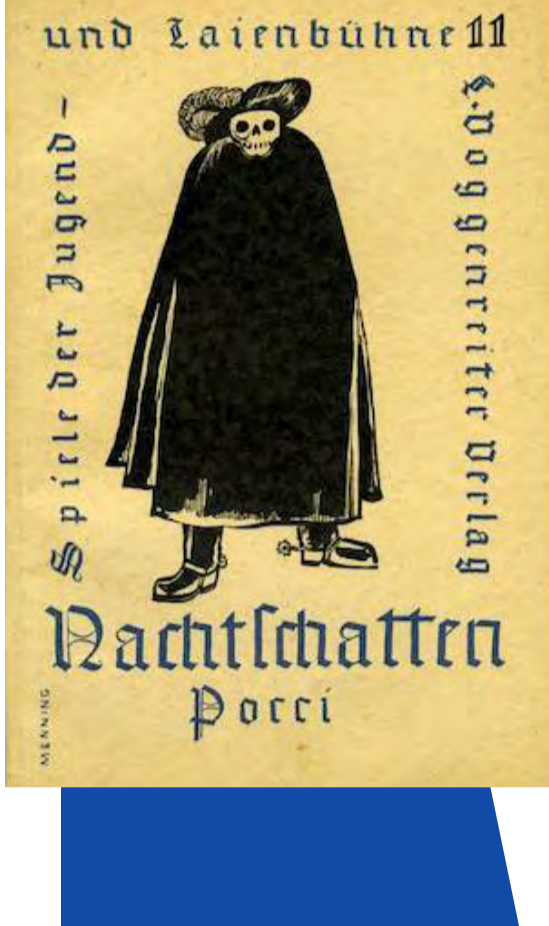
[Prof. Dr. Didier Plassard]



Flyer for *Attila in Padova, ovvero Il trionfo d'Ezio proconsole romano con Famiola contadino* (Attila in Padua, or The Triumph of the Roman proconsul Aetius, with Famiola as a peasant), a show performed by the Genoese puppeteer Ugo Ponti, 1874. Biblioteca Civica Scuola Paolo Grassi, Milan. Biblioteca Civica Scuola Paolo Grassi, Milan.

Kasperl in the turmoil of German inter-war period

The red Kasper from the 1920s is well-known¹, but there was also the anti-communist Kasperl at the same time. In reaction to the Munich Soviet Republic, i.e. the communist-inspired government that was proclaimed in Bavaria during the German revolution of 1918-1919, conservative Catholic circles produced several militant texts in the immediate post-war period: the play *Kasperl und der Kommunist* [Kasperl and the Communist] by the Munich sculptor Franz Drexler, or the play *Nachtschatten* [Night Shadows], written in 1920 by Ernst Poggi – the grandson of “puppet count” Franz von Poggi. The latter is even the main character of the play: he comes down from Heaven to see his good city of Munich again, meets revolutionary Kurt Eisner, and has a talk with Death and the Devil, who both now rule in the Soviet Republic. The text is explicitly anti-Semitic. At the end, Ernst Poggi calls for a renewal of the strength of German people. “This young poet sadly died too early to see his vision of a liberating future come true”, his cousin wrote in the introduction to the posthumous publication of the text in 1934, by an editor who was now printing decidedly Nazi plays. Adolf Hitler had come a long way since the Soviet Republic had been crushed in blood.



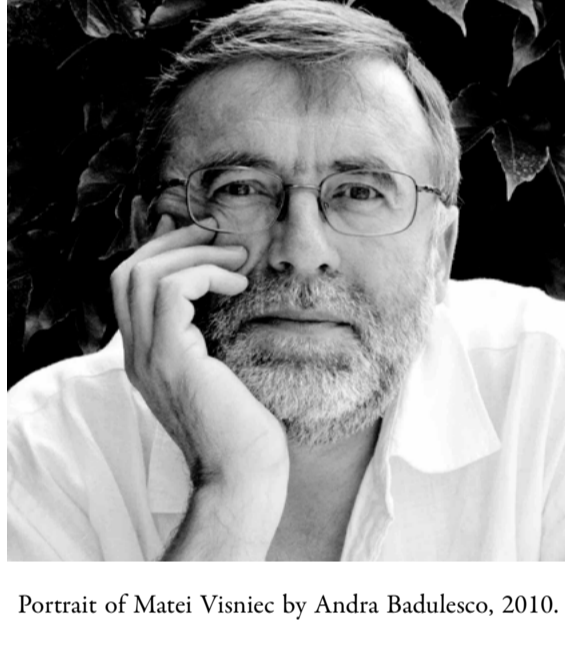
[Dr. Jean Boutan]

1. Gina Weinkauff: *Rote Kasperl-Texte* [Red Kasperl-Texts]. Frankfurt, Puppen & Masken, 1986.

Ernst Poggi: *Nachtschatten*. Potsdam, Voggenreiter Verlag, 1934. Cover design by Wilhelm Menning, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Puppentheatersammlung (clickable link below this newsletter).

The failure of an ecological and anti-speciesist utopia

Some writers, like the French-Romanian Matei Visniec, without having directly written for the puppet, have a special relationship with it, sometimes by giving it a place in some of their plays, sometimes because their plays are adapted or staged by puppeteers. For example, Alain Lecuq transposed *Mansarde à Paris* [Mansard in Paris] (2010) for paper theatre, and Catherine Hugo (Compagnie Ka) created *Désillusions marionnettiques* [Puppeteering disillusionment] (2011) after *L'Araignée dans la plaie* [The Spider in the Wound] and *Une baignoire révolutionnaire* [A revolutionary bathtub]. As a journalist for Radio France International, Visniec lets the great uproar of the world enter his work: situations of war, migratory or environmental crises... *La Mémoire des serpillères* [Memory of the mops] is no exception to the rule. In the midst of media and moral decay, a war reporter, covering a grotesque conflict created from nothing in Central Europe, has a decisive experience that could change the course of humanity. As the rats spread across the war zone, one of them - perhaps the legendary “Rat King”, product of the intelligence of his species - telepathically contacts the journalist to propose a pact with humanity: all the rats of the world agree to devour all the waste produced by humans everywhere on the planet - including toxic waste - on condition that humans provide them with a minimal, safe space in every home. Spread by the media, this ecological revolution also has an ontological dimension, since each human being is now identified by the number of rats assigned to him to clean up his mess. Caught in a vice between unsuccessful political negotiations and individual panic attacks - because each human being can no longer move around without his or her entourage of rats - the utopia of animal/human collaboration eventually fails. Written for actors (human characters) and puppets (the rats), this gritty comedy (published by L'Ceil du Prince, 2020) was staged in 2015 by Victor Quezada-Perez at the Avignon Festival, but without puppets.



Portrait of Matei Visniec by Andra Badulescu, 2010.

[Dr. Carole Guidicelli]

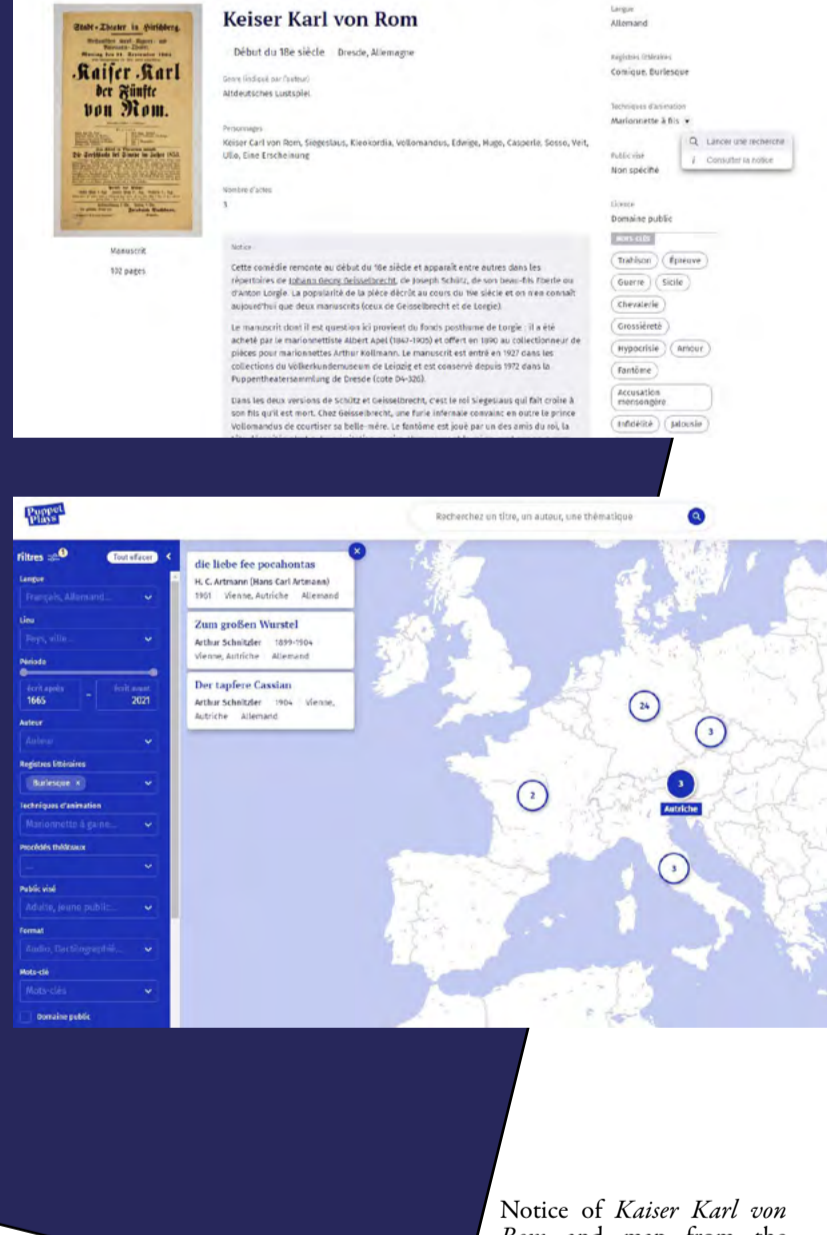
Browsing through the plays in the database

Since the public opening of the puppetplays.eu platform on June 9th 2022 at Le Mouffettard - Théâtre des arts de la marionnette in Paris, it is possible for everyone to discover the work, manipulation technique and author records offered by our platform. In addition to this rich textual data, more discreet but equally rich information is offered: links. Works are linked to each other, authors to each other, and works and authors to each other in different ways and at different levels. From each record, you can go to other records with a click, discover new repertoires and find ever more surprising works.

This is where the real richness of a database lies: not so much in the storage of information and its dynamic display, but above all in its relationships, in the linkage created between the various entries in the database. Each link is truly a data, in the same way as the summary of a piece, but with a particularly strong semantic value: not only does it characterise the work it links, but it also brings together all the works with the same characteristic. These links describe as much as they group, they enrich without modifying. Browsing through the data should therefore be done “à sauts et à gambades” [jumping and leaping], both for the sake of a sound construction of one's database and for the pleasure of reading and discovering.

Enjoy your browsing through the platform!

[Ma.Paul Robert]



Notice of *Kaiser Karl von Rom* and map from the puppetplays.eu platform.

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To read online, free access:

The last issue of the digital journal *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama* (European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement ERC 835193), edited par Nicola Pasqualino, and entitled *Puppet, Death, and the Devil: Presences of Afterlife in Puppet Theatre*.

You will discover three articles written by the researchers of the *PuppetPlays* team :

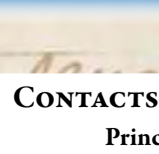
Haunted Figures, Haunting Figures: Puppets and Marionettes as Testimonies of Liminal States
 By Didier Plassard et Carole Guidicelli

Death, the Devil and the Wife: Danse Macabre Motifs in Nineteenth-Century Puppetry, from Punch to Kasperl
 By Jean Boutan

Figurations of Evil in Contemporary Puppet Theatre Dramaturgy
 By Francesca Di Fazio

[CLICKABLE LINK BELOW THIS NEWSLETTER]

We wish you a great summer. See you in September !



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