

Editorial : One Guignol may hide another

Sometimes success is more dangerous than failure. When mentioning the name of Guignol in France, the first image people will usually have in mind is a puppet character with a sheepy smile sold as one of the most mawkish commercial by-products. A hero for the little ones, so well-intentioned that he no longer generates laughter but rather tenderness, Guignol, just like Kasperl in German-speaking countries, has spread a narrow idea of puppetry among the general public against which we constantly have to fight.

Exploring the collections of the musée des arts de la marionnette-Gadagne in Lyon, as *PuppetPlays* has done for a week in November, is essential to understand what Guignol was and what he can become again. Reading the plays is not a journey back in time to the origins of the character, since he was probably born from oral improvisations, but it does give us an idea of the diversity of the repertoire, of its roots in the city, its multiple links with the inhabitants.

Even if we know that the puppeteers did not strictly follow the texts they wrote down in order to submit them to the censors, diving into the hundreds of preserved manuscripts is no less exciting. All prejudices fall away in front of the variety of registers (fairy tale, fantastic, satirical, lyrical, erotic) and the profusion of voices that can be heard. Then Guignol's reappropriation by the Lyon bourgeoisie and the regional academies, long looked upon with suspicion, only arouses astonishment: is there any other popular character who has made all social classes, from the worker to the minister of the Third Republic, want to write adventures about him?

Illustration: L'Horloge Charver (1884), Hôtel Gadagne, Lyon.

[Prof. Dr. Didier Plassard]



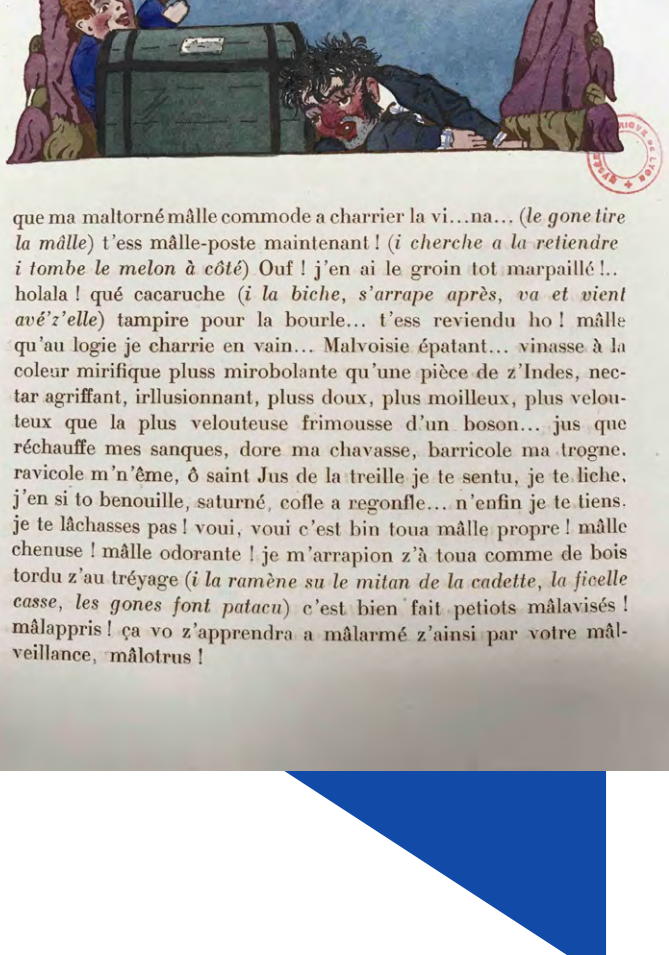
“Every Guignol comedy has that in common with Beaujolais wine that it must be tasted on the spot.” (Édouard David)

Exploring the collections of the library of the musée des arts de la marionnette-Gadagne in Lyon is a wonderful opportunity to discover some of the amazing personalities behind the texts of the Guignol repertoire. For example Justin Godart (1871-1956), who was a lawyer, senator, minister and founder of the League against Cancer, but also president of the Société des Amis de Guignol and author, under the pseudonym of Catherin Bugnard, of several Guignol plays, such as *L'École des ménagères*.

One of the most unusual personalities in Lyon is Eugène Lefebvre, a famous illustrator, illuminator and bookbinder much appreciated by bibliophiles, born in Feysin in 1877. Under the pseudonym of L'Ugène Ponteau, he wrote and/or illustrated numerous plays for puppets. Like Frédéric Mistral did with the Provençal dialect, he raised the Canuts' dialect to the level of a literary language. The author of plays for Picardy puppets, Édouard David, devoted a book to him (*Un illustrateur lyonnais, Eugène Lefebvre, L'Ugène Ponteau*, 1932) in which he compared his writing to that of Villon, Rabelais, Molière or Labiche.

By the way, do you know what a 'ponteau' is? If you are not from Lyon, and even if you are not familiar with the canuts, it is almost impossible to know. The "ponteau" refers to the piece of wood that holds the two parts of the canuts' weaving loom together. Without it, the weaving loom is wobbly, "unstuck". In common Lyonnais, someone who is "déponetele" (Justin Godart reminds us of this) is internally collapsed, depressed. What better, then, than to go and see a real Lyon puppet show?

[Dr. Carole Guidicelli]

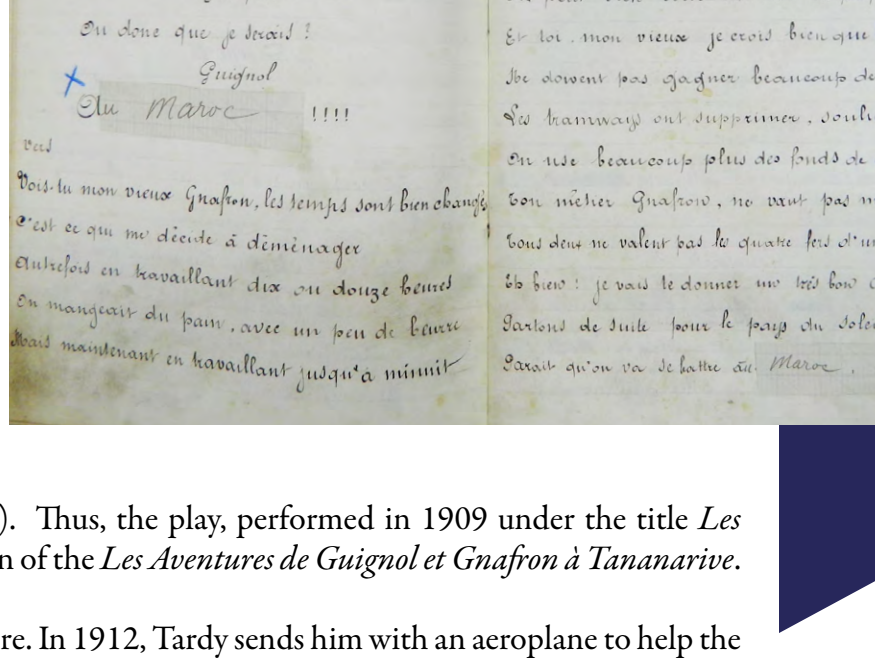


Extract from *La Malle* (1922) by L'Ugène Ponteau, © musée des arts de la marionnette-Gadagne, Lyon.

Guignol's and Gnafron's Journey, from Madagascar to Morocco

At the end of 1895, Guignol and Gnafron head off to conquer Madagascar. The mission succeeds: Guignol marries the princess of the island Aval Eau, and Gnafron adopts a mixed-race child. This half-military, half-love adventure was written by Tony Tardy: *Les Aventures de Guignol et Gnafron à Tananarive*, performed at the Théâtre Guignol du Passage de l'Argue, brought the author a mediocre income but exceptional success. Encouraged, Tardy left for Saint-Étienne and began his new life as an actor and author at Denis Valentin's Théâtre Guignol. The following year, he wrote a second version of the play for this theatre, this time entitled *Voyage de Guignol et Gnafron à Madagascar* (apparently to avoid a conflict of interest with Marius Lamadon, director of the Théâtre de Guignol de Passage de l'Argue, who owned the rights to the original manuscript). The play was subjected to several minor changes that did not affect the plot.

On their way to conquer Madagascar, Guignol and Gnafron are unaware that the future prepares another destination for them: Tardy begins to elaborate a new play, *Guignol au Maroc*, on the pages of the 1896 manuscript. In it, Guignol does not tell Gnafron that they are going to Tananarive, but to Morocco; Ramastonbazar, chief of the Malagasy Hovas, becomes Caïd, the Moroccan sultan; and Celkifeltrotoar, Ramastonbazar's spy, changes her name to Kelah d'bel fez and then to Ziléma, the Caïd's daughter. In Morocco, Guignol becomes a sultan, and Gnafron marries a "négresse" (although he only wanted a bottle of Beaujolais). Thus, the play, performed in 1909 under the title *Les Français au Maroc*, is only a variation of the *Les Aventures de Guignol et Gnafron à Tananarive*.



Guignol's conquests do not end there. In 1912, Tardy sends him with an aeroplane to help the Bulgarian army besieging Adrianople, but that is another story and this time definitely another play.

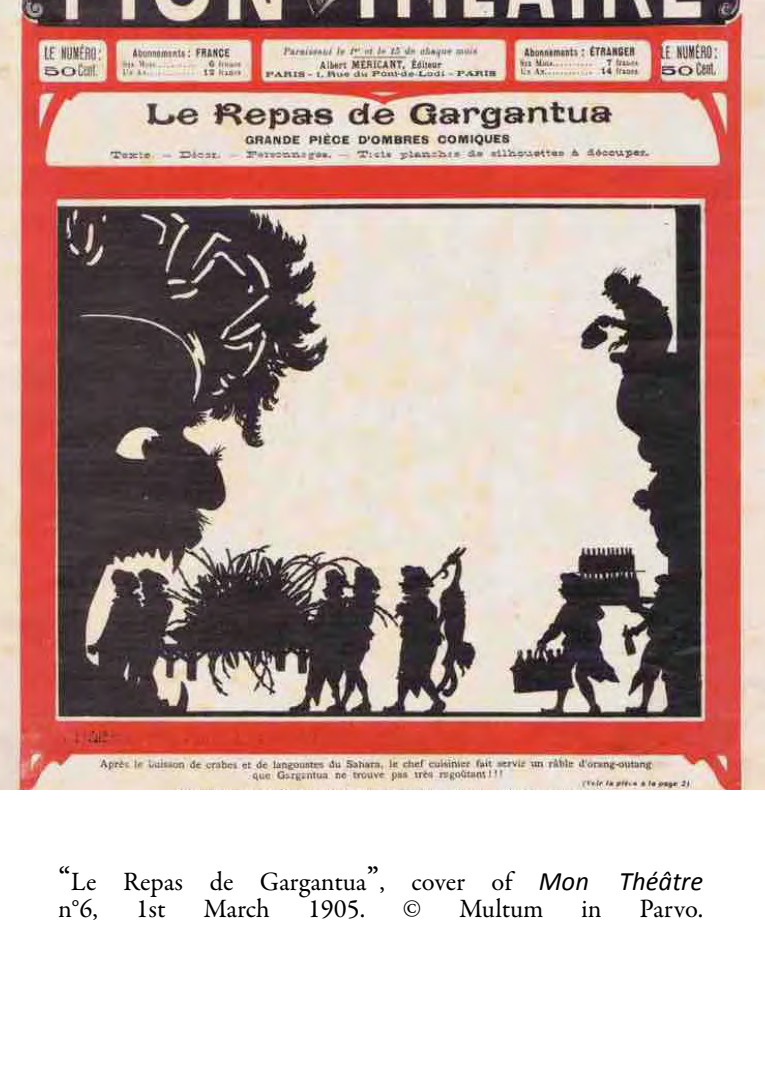
Illustration : Tony Tardy, *Les Aventures de Guignol et Gnafron à Madagascar*, © musée des arts de la marionnette-Gadagne, Lyon.

[Dr. Yanna Kor]

Let's eat! Gargantua's shadow is hungry...

Published in 1905 by Albert Méricant, the fortnightly magazine *Mon Théâtre* offered families, in each of its issues, a play for paper theatre, with sets and silhouettes to cut out. In the sixth issue, the play entitled *Le Repas de Gargantua* was more specifically intended for shadow theatre.

As the material provided suggests, the technique was chosen so as to accentuate the contrast between the small human figures and the giant's frightening head, and to suggest the extraordinary profusion of the dishes ("hippopotamus consommé", "melon of 20kg", "gigantic octopus", "ostrich fricassée"...).



"Le Repas de Gargantua", cover of *Mon Théâtre* n°6, 1st March 1905. © Mulum in Parvo.

A truncated copy of this text is kept at the Mucem (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations in Marseille, France.). The page of the magazine was cut out, glued back together and completed with handwritten notes that give the initial narrative text a properly dramatic form (deletion of the interpolated clauses and addition of the characters' names before each line). The more distinct detachment of the stage directions, especially the "clap...clap...clap..." indicating the snapping of jaws, also highlights one of the main comic devices of this adaptation: the repetitive and grotesque movements of the hungry mouth, that opens and closes at the edge of the screen, indiscriminately devouring dishes, crockery and servants.

[Ma. Sophie Courtade]

What has become of Pulcinella and his voice today?

The *guarattellaro* Nunzio Zampella (1920-1946) said that his Pulcinella, however small, was his father. The contemporary *guarattellari* show the same attachment to their Pulcinella. Some identify with him. Others prefer to distinguish themselves from him. But all are deeply grateful to him having built their career with him. So he is present in all their shows, even those that introduce characters, themes and materials foreign to the classical repertoire of the *guarattelle*. What is the role of Pulcinella in these new shows?

In Gaspare Nasuto's shows, the protagonist is often another character – Death, a witch, a pig, etc. Pulcinella then meets these characters as if by chance and opens unexpected ways for the staged story. In Bruno Leone's shows, on the other hand, Pulcinella is always the protagonist, even when the glove puppet with the headgear and the black mask is not present. In these cases, other characters adopt his position, his voice, and his function to reverse the situation. In Irene Vecchia's *Un caso cromosomico*, in which the puppeteer has moved away from the framework of the *guarattelle*, she has still entrusted Pulcinella and his voice with a determining role, even if small.



[Dr. Anna Leone]

The new productions of contemporary Neapolitan puppeteers show us that Pulcinella is first of all a voice, a voice that, today as in the past, allows to give an unexpected answer to every situation. As the philosopher Giorgio Agamben says, Pulcinella and his voice open an "escape".

Further reading:
 Complete descriptions (in French) of the plays *Pulcinella e l'asino del diavolo* ; *Pulchi Shaka and Speare* et *Un caso cromosomico* are available on puppetplays.eu.

Illustration : Irene Vecchia and her Pulcinella, in *Un caso cromosomico*. Photograph by Domenico Semeraro.

News

Thesis defense
 On Monday 21 November at 14:00, at Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, Francesca Di Fazio will defend her doctoral thesis, prepared in the framework of the *PuppetPlays* project and in cotutelle with Università da Bologna (Italy) and entitled:

The puppet and its drama. Dramaturgies for contemporary puppet theatre in France and Italy (1981-2020).

Call for papers
 for the next international *PuppetPlays* conference in may 2023 :

Portrait of the Puppeteer as Author. Writing practices for puppeteers in Western Europe (17th – 21st century)
 More information on our website.

Conference
 On Friday 2 December, during the conference *Hasard et nécessité au théâtre XIX^e-XXI^e siècles*, organised at Université de Rouen-Normandie by the CÉRÉDI (Rouen-Normandie), the IRIHS (Rouen-Normandie) and the IRET (Sorbonne Nouvelle), Carole Guidicelli will present a paper entitled :

L'écriture avec marionnettes, entre la chaîne et la roue.
[Writing with puppets, between the chain and the wheel.]

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