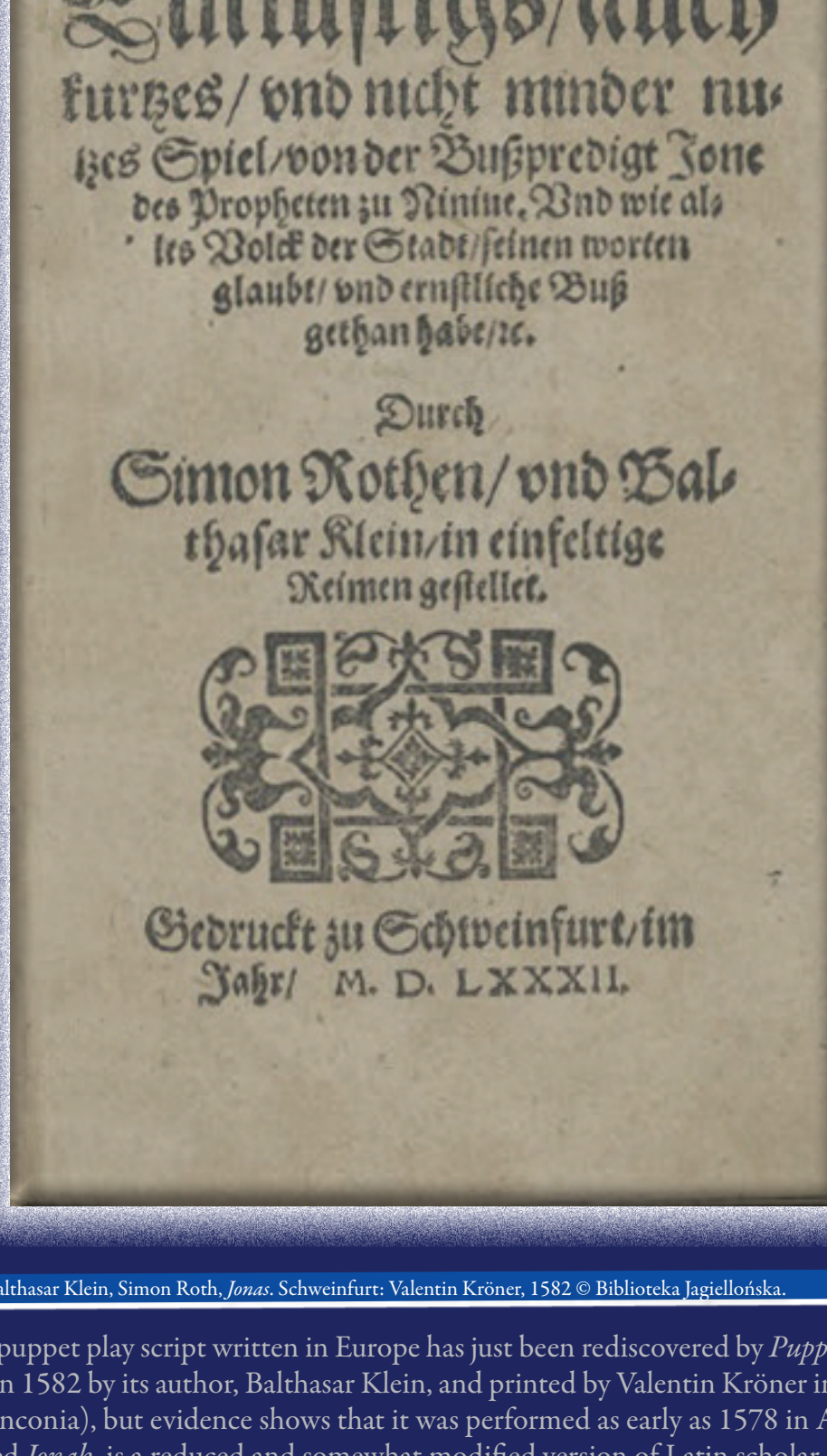


## Editorial : A historic discovery



Picture: Balthasar Klein, Simon Roth, *Jonas*, Schweinfurt, Valentin Kröner, 1582 © Biblioteka Jagiellońska.

The oldest puppet play script written in Europe has just been rediscovered by *PuppetPlays*. It was published in 1582 by its author, Balthasar Klein, and printed by Valentin Kröner in Schweinfurt (Lower Franconia), but evidence shows that it was performed as early as 1578 in Augsburg. The play, entitled *Jonas*, is a reduced and somewhat modified version of Latin scholar Simon Roth's earlier stage adaptation of the *Book of Jonah*. The story of this Old Testament prophet was a popular subject during the Renaissance period. Sent by God to announce the destruction of the city of Nineveh, Jonah tried to escape his mission by fleeing on a boat, only to be swallowed up by a fish in whose belly he remained for three days before eventually being spat out. When he arrived in Nineveh, he urged the inhabitants to repent, for they were about to be punished and their city destroyed. The inhabitants repented but God forgave them, which triggered Jonah's anger at seeing his prophecy unfulfilled.

What does the puppet bring to the performance of this story? It surely tightens up the dialogue but, more importantly, it makes it more spectacular: God appears on stage, whereas in Simon Roth's play he was just a backstage voice; the episode of the fish swallowing up the prophet is directly represented, just like the miraculous gourd and its leaves which protect Jonah. On the puppet stage, the legend can actually be seen, and not merely heard.

Unfortunately, there are no surviving images of Balthasar Klein's puppets. He may well have used a *Himmelreich*, that is, a set of large, mechanical figures manipulated from below the stage – but this is only a hypothesis.

The book, of which only one copy is known, is kept in the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow.

[Prof. Didier Plassard]

## From Shakespeare to *The Sexual Lives of Puppets*



Suki: "You're not attracted to me?" in *The Sexual Lives of Puppets* (2024). © Mark Down, Blind Summit Theatre.

This month, Mark Down, artistic director, playwright, puppeteer and co-founder of Blind Summit Theatre, kindly agreed to an online interview with the *PuppetPlays* team.

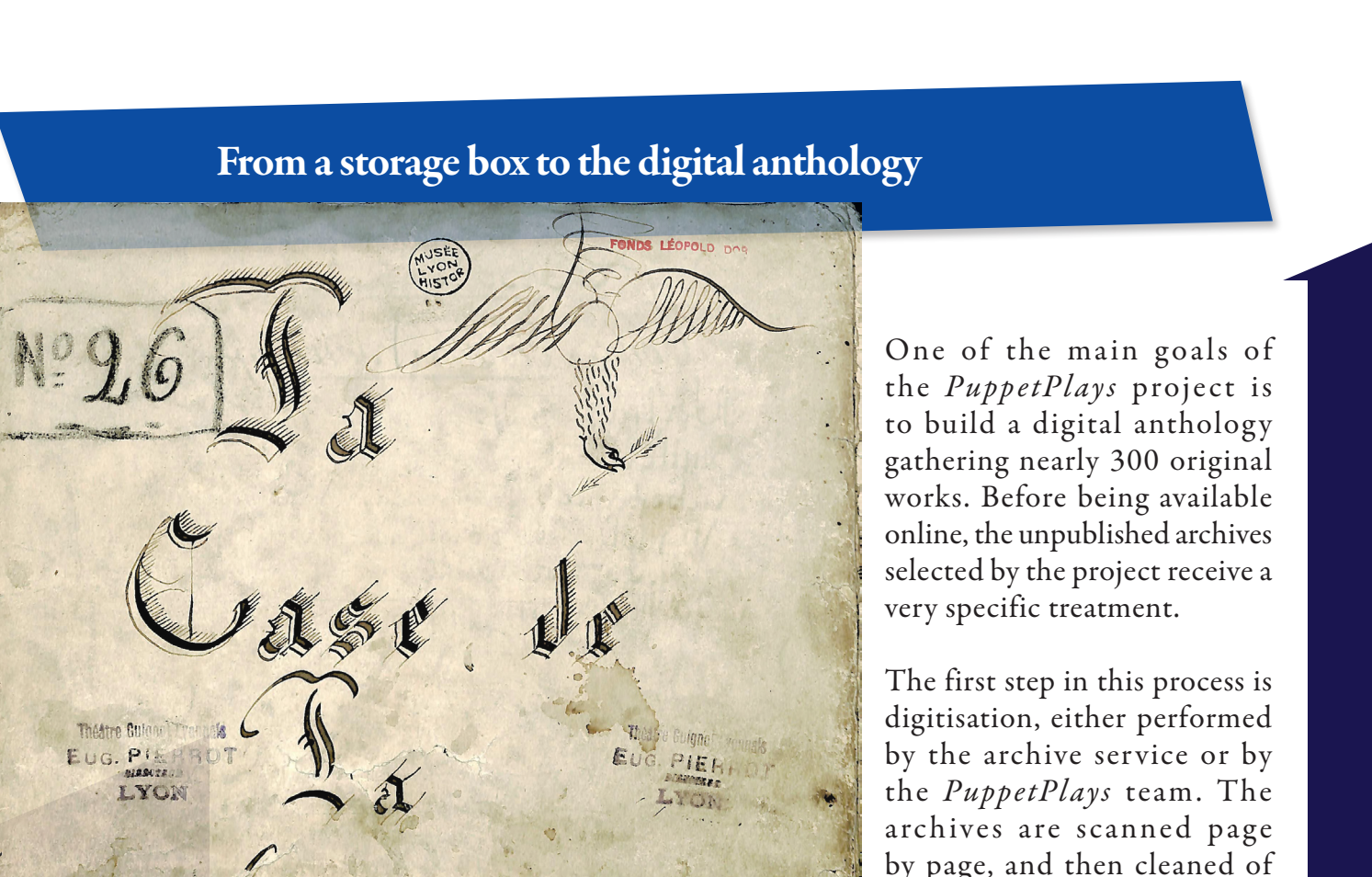
Based in London, Blind Summit is one of the UK's most active companies. Their aim is to offer adult audiences quality shows that challenge all expectations. Over the last twenty years, Blind Summit has created original productions - *The Table*, *The Sexual Lives of Puppets*, ... - and productions feeding on existing literary works - Charles Bukowski's poems for *Low Life*, George Orwell's *1984*,... - which deal with social issues (religion, sexual intimacy, alcoholism) through the prism of humour.

Although Blind Summit's shows often feature *bunraku*-type puppets, the company has a constant desire to experiment, collaborating with Simon McBurney and Hijinx Theatre, as well as creating giant puppets for the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

During our conversation, Mark Down reflected on the long process of creating puppet shows. Most of the time, the puppets are created first, then workshops are held to test them. It can take up to a decade for a show to come to fruition. For example, the first puppet in *The Sexual Lives of Puppets* was created twelve years ago. This comic play (Blind Summit's latest creation) was an immediate success and has already been nominated for two Offies, which reward London's independent theatres. Mark Down also explained the difficulty, in projects such as *Puppeting Shakespeare*, of striking the right balance between the poetic richness of the texts and the visual power of puppetry.

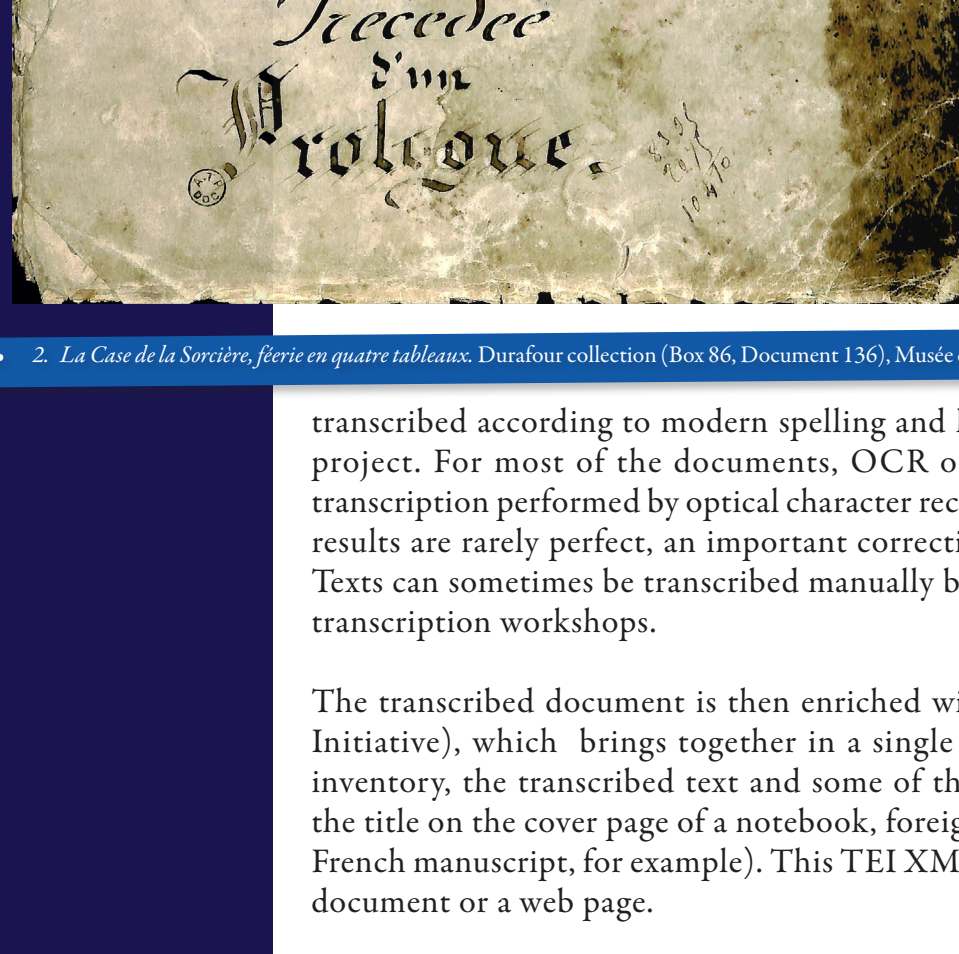
Many thanks to Mark Down for taking the time to answer our questions and for agreeing to share resources with us! Some of his plays will soon be described into our database.

[Dr. Cécile Decaix]



Performance of *The Table* (2011) at the Schlossmediale Festival (Switzerland). © Blind Summit Theatre.

## From a storage box to the digital anthology



2. *La Case de la Sorcière, férie en quatre tableaux*. Duraufour collection (Box 86, Document 136), Musée des Arts de la Marionnette, Lyon.

One of the main goals of the *PuppetPlays* project is to build a digital anthology gathering nearly 300 original works. Before being available online, the unpublished archives selected by the project receive a very specific treatment.

The first step in this process is digitisation, either performed by the archive service or by the *PuppetPlays* team. The archives are scanned page by page, and then cleaned of fingerprints and reflections, cropped, renamed and transformed into JPEG files. All the descriptive information (title, date, location, archive box, identifier of both the physical and digital documents, etc.) is compiled in an inventory. Works are gathered in "collection" folders corresponding to their conservation centre.

Once the files are cleaned, sorted and documented, we work on their contents themselves. The plays are

transcribed according to modern spelling and layout of the guidelines drawn up by the project. For most of the documents, OCR or HTR technologies (automated transcription performed by optical character recognition software) are used. As the results are rarely perfect, an important correction and proofreading phase starts. Texts can sometimes be transcribed manually by the team or during collaborative transcription workshops.

The transcribed document is then enriched with TEI encoding (Text Encoding Initiative), which brings together in a single XML file the metadata from the inventory, the transcribed text and some of the layout information (location of the title on the cover page of a notebook, foreign language parts in a German and French manuscript, for example). This TEI XML file is then converted into a PDF document or a web page.

Finally, the TEI XML file (text) and its corresponding JPEG file (image) are uploaded to the Nakala open science repository to ensure the long-term preservation of our work. Once the *PuppetPlays* platform is complete, it will be possible to see the digitised work alongside its modernised transcription and download them both as PDF files.

[Maxine Schoecheys-Kreiss]



Research expedition to the Musée des Arts de la Marionnette (Lyon) to scan the Guignol manuscripts, December 2023.

We can't just publish anything in the anthology! The plays are all in the public domain or distributed with the author's agreement.

## La Guida di Bragia : Lewis Carroll and puppets



While Lewis Carroll is best known for his wildly imaginative *Alice in Wonderland*, few know that the British author also wrote puppet plays. He is said to have composed several as a teenager to entertain his little sisters. The text of only one of them has survived – *La Guida di Bragia*. This is the only surviving theatrical piece written by Carroll that has come down to us. This comic play (*burletta*), which alternates between dialogues and songs, features a series of misunderstandings in which the characters keep missing the train because of the Bradshaw guides (which provided the train timetables, and which the play's title refers to).

Long lost, the play's manuscript was (re)discovered in 1929 at a Sotheby's auction and published by the Lewis Carroll Society of North America (LCSNA) in 1999. An expanded edition featuring the text together with a facsimile of the manuscript was published in 2007 by the same association. A private performance was also staged by David Olson at the LCSNA meeting in Santa Fe in 2009, and several puppets were built, both in preparation for the show and during creative workshops.

[Dr. Cécile Decaix]

*La Guida di Bragia* is available here: <https://archive.org/details/knightletterno6100/lewi/page/2/mode/2up>

## Latest news

Read Cristina Grazioli's article on the latest *PuppetPlays* symposium on the *Arabeschi* magazine website: <http://bit.ly/3wkF5jY>

The proceedings of the conference *Representing alterity through puppetry and performing objects* (University of Connecticut) are now online; you will find a contribution from Didier Plassard and another one from Francesca Di Fazio: [https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/ballinr\\_alterity/](https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/ballinr_alterity/)

Didier Plassard and Carole Guidicelli will give two lectures as part of the *Jornadas Internacionais de Marionetas 24*: [https://www.eselx.ipl.pt/comunidade/encontros/jim/conferencias\\_paineis](https://www.eselx.ipl.pt/comunidade/encontros/jim/conferencias_paineis)

**JOB OPPORTUNITY:**  
*PuppetPlays* hires a Legal Administrative Officer.  
Link to the job description on the University Paul Valéry – Montpellier 3 website: <https://www.univ-montp3.fr/fr/offres-emplois/upvm>

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement ERC 835193

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