





# CAST

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# ABSTRACT

## EN

The puppet Tchantchès is a well-known character introduced by the nineteenth-century working-class puppeteers in Liège. His resemblance to his audience, and his fights for a righteous cause during chivalrous plays contributed greatly to his popularity. Over time, he gradually got detached from his roots and was written into literature he developed into a generalized symbol of regional-identity. Poets and playwrights, especially during the first and second World Wars, gave Tchantchès a new presence in this changing society. They humanised him, completing the work of personification established in the previous period. This thesis explores the impact of patrimonialization on the historical development of Tchantchès, using interviews, literary sources and scripts as source material. Furthermore, I investigate how this patrimonialization will leave an imprint for future generations, as this preservation develops into “living patrimony”, conserving not only objects, but testimonies about the past.

## FR

Tchantchès, une marionnette populaire créée à Liège au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle par des marionnettistes ouvriers, est un héros bien connu pour ses liens avec son public et ses croisades pour défendre la juste cause lors de pièces chevaleresques. Avec le temps, il s'est progressivement détaché de ses racines pour devenir un symbole généralisé de l'identité régionale. Les poètes et les dramaturges, surtout pendant les deux guerres mondiales, ont donné à Tchantchès une nouvelle présence dans cette société en mutation : ils l'ont humanisé, complétant le travail de personnification établi dans la période initiale. Après avoir mené des entretiens et utilisé diverses sources littéraires et scénaristiques, j'explore à travers ce mémoire l'impact de la patrimonialisation sur le développement historique de Tchantchès. En outre, j'étudie la manière dont cette patrimonialisation laissera une empreinte pour les générations futures, à mesure que le processus de préservation évolue vers un “patrimoine vivant” en conservant non seulement des objets mais aussi des témoignages du passé.



Vinâve d'Île street in Liège in the 19th century



# PROLOGUE

1.  
Neven,  
C., &  
Haertjens, L.  
(2001), (p.  
35-36)

2.  
Jurkows-  
ki, H. (2009).  
Online / URL:  
<https://wepa.unima.org/en/europe/>

3.  
Ancion,  
J. (2015).  
Online / URL:  
<https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches>

The immersion into fiction allows us to escape from place and time. Puppet theater is, by nature, unconstrained by the demands of reality and logic. The show requires the spectator's direct engagement, whether conscious or not. Yet a certain openness of spirit is required in order to fully immerse oneself in the chivalrous adventures of popular legends, as well as accept their comical exaggeration<sup>1</sup>. The marionette is a strong visual medium that enables the spectators to relate to a common figure. Puppet theatres will always stand out due to the fact that they bring inanimate and silent creatures to life by means of vocal energy and movement. It's these two characteristics that create the dynamic interaction with the audience, and evoke their emotions, which is crucial for a good show.

In the 17th century, the puppet theater became the main entertainment place for common Europeans. Groups like *commedia dell'arte* used characters such as Pulcinella to mark European puppet theaters<sup>2</sup>. The theatre was a place for freedom and fantasy, transporting the audience on long voyages along with their favourite heroes. This was not limited only to common folk; writers, students, and intellectuals also enjoyed this form of entertainment<sup>3</sup>. Together, they would dream and wonder what the world outside of their village or country could possibly be like.

Comprehending the need to preserve the art and the folklore linked to the puppet theatre, a process called patrimonialization<sup>4</sup> was developed in the beginning of the 20th century<sup>5</sup>. Patrimonialization is the removal of the ownership of an object from an individual and entrusting it to a common collection. In doing so, the object's survival is ensured for future generations and it becomes an official part of history. The selection process that is undergone during patrimonialization ensures that only certain things can become part of a culture's heritage. They are examined for common

4. A  
process  
by which a  
material or  
immaterial  
element  
becomes a  
constitutive  
part of a  
community's  
identity that  
imbues said  
element with  
meaning and  
significance.

5.  
Breu-  
neval, A.  
(2013). (p.12)

Pulcinella, a burattino (glove puppet) by puppeteer (burattinaio) Carlo Piantadosi (d.2012)



6

ACT ONE

3.

# PROLOGUE

6. The ever-changing patrimonialization procedure gained world-wide importance after the damage caused by the First and Second World Wars, highlighted by the foundation of institutions such as UNESCO, created to preserve significant places and monuments.

traits, in order to determine which keepsakes are worth safeguarding. This thesis will explore the concept of patrimonialization in depth in Act two.

Through the analysis of the puppet Tchantchès, this study will attempt to prove that the nature of patrimonialization is to unify and preserve material or immaterial cultural heritage for later generations<sup>6</sup>. This thesis will analyse the extent to which the patrimonialization process limits the essence of the entities that are preserved, focussing on the puppet Tchantchès and the Liégeois puppet theatre.

In this research, I focus on the case of Tchantchès, a famous marionnette in Liège and how his induction into the official heritage of Wallonia has changed how he is perceived in the present. The time frame of this project extends from the birth of puppetry in the 1830s, until the 1960s when puppetry was forced to radically change to survive in a new social climate. The later analysis of a play by Adrien Dufour, extends the time period to 1982. Tchantchès' significance as an icon, and a means of communication is explored in depth during this time period.

The exploration of the rich history behind Tchantchès during a personal visit to Liège, revealed a much broader picture of the circumstances under which he exists in the present, representing more than 175 years of history. In this study, I aim to understand how Tchantchès' opinion and aesthetic have changed under the influence of the patrimonialization process. The context, intentions, official discourses, and subversions of this process are considered attempts to stay true to the same iconic figure, and evolve with a changing world simultaneously.

As the scripts, substantiated by context, provided the most insight into the subject of this research, my paper reflects the structure of a theatre script. This project consists of a first act, where

There finally seems to be enough archived information to analyse and examine how the process of patrimonialization has been managed over time.



# PROLOGUE

7.  
Demoulin,  
B., & Kupper,  
J.-L. (2002)  
(p.168-170)

Tchantchè's origin and primary role in 19th century society are explored, and a second act, in which patrimonialization and its effects on Tchantchè and his character are explored in detail.

The first act of this paper explains the importance of Tchantchè's history, rooted in rebellion<sup>7</sup>, and the artistic freedom that came with playing his character. It also explores the societal changes to which the puppet theatres had to adapt during the time frame of this thesis. Furthermore, Tchantchè's more pronounced political side can be seen in the script of the play entitled *The Four Sons of Aymon*, a tale about knights and rebellion, analysed in this paper.

The second act delves into the selection process undergone by objects during patrimonialization. This thesis examines the motivations of the founding fathers of the Musée de la Vie Wallonne, or Museum of Walloon Life, to begin gathering objects and to protect their history. The evolution of patrimonialization, and how it became more than just collecting objects, but also collecting stories of the people who used them was also explored, creating what is now known as "living patrimony"<sup>8</sup>. Tchantchè's induction into literary works and how this caused the curious phenomenon of the spontaneous standardization of his character and his appearance, is further explored.

During the course of this paper, I expose how the process of preserving our heritage can be a double-edged sword. It gives us the opportunity to preserve important material objects and immaterial folklore for future generations, but it also forces us to discard others. As discussed in detail in this thesis, the granting of the status of cultural patrimony can sever it from its context, losing part of its original cultural essence.

8.  
Immaterial  
heritage is a  
term created  
at UNESCO  
in contrast to  
built heritage.  
Long known  
as folklore and then known as folk arts and traditions, oral  
traditions or traditional culture, intangible heritage is con-  
stantly evolving. Hence the common use of the expression  
living heritage to name it.

# ACT 1 : THE NEED FOR A HERO

9. Liège was nicknamed “*the little France of the Meuse*” when it was absorbed by the then expanding French republic.

10. Ancion, J. (2015). Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches/>

the branch of science and technology concerned with the properties of metals and their production and purification.

11. *Ibid.* Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches/>

After an era of stability and relative peace in the aristocratic republic of Liège, the French Revolution erupted in 1792<sup>9</sup>. During its occupation, the town went through many changes and its importance increased significantly. The Saint-Lambert Cathedral, which stood as a symbol for the power of the clergy, was sacrificed on the revolutionary altar, leaving an enormous hole in the centre of the ancient city. However, the Revolution also brought growth, such as the creation of the Canon Foundry after the bombardment of the Outremeuse district in 1794.

At the end of the 19th century, Liège was undergoing a significant metamorphosis.

Influenced by the European era of mechanization, Liège, already leaning in such a direction thanks to its previous activities, became a powerful industrial centre due to its powerful mining and the metallurgical industry<sup>10</sup>.

Yet it is not until the Belgian Revolution in 1830, when Belgium gained independence, that the history of puppetry in the country really started to develop. Some of the many nomadic showmen who appeared at festivals, fairs and markets left records of their increased number and activity, extending over a longer period of time<sup>11</sup>.

Liège became a crossroads of cultures and communities<sup>12</sup>, sprouting the first theatres in response to the growing industrial urbanization of the 19th century. Small permanent theatres arose, and people attended the shows, instead of heading home or to the various pubs. The puppeteers performing in these theatres were simply the first enthusiastic worker from each district, supplying adventures, dreams, heroes, as well as social commentary. They performed each evening for their spectators, who were often illiterate<sup>13</sup>.

A list composed in 1902 noted more than fifty theatres operating in Liège and its suburbs<sup>14</sup>.

12. Josse, M. (2009). Online / URL: <https://www.liege.be/en/discover/tourism/discover-liege/history-of-liege/history-of-liege>

13. Ancion, J. (2015). Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches/>

14. *Ibid.* Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches/>

Old Tchantchès before 1900 kept in the Museum of Walloon Life. We can see that his costume was not yet the one we know today and that he dressed according to the public present in his theatre. Tchantchès also wears the red nose of a lover of peket, the genever.



## ACT 1 : THE NEED FOR A HERO

15.  
Also known as Di mon  
Con'tii.

16.  
Ancion, J. (2015). Online  
/ URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches/>

17.  
Demoulin, B., & Kupper,  
J.-L. (2002). (p.139-140)

18.  
Fleury, R. (2019), Un  
médium d'émancipation  
créative (p.317-333).

However, the mention of the first puppet theatre, directed by the Tuscan Alessandro Conti (1830-1903)<sup>15</sup> in collaboration with Frenchman Thomas Talbot (1885-unknown), was recorded in 1860. The public gathered daily in the largest room of the house, which acted as a theatre<sup>16</sup>. During the performances, novels were read word for word and performed without any deviation from the original script. The importance of these regular gatherings should not be overlooked. It created a sense of belonging and community at a time where the lower class was oppressed and vulnerable. Working in distressingly poor conditions for countless hours each day, created a craving for distraction and amusement. This search for unity and support, through a common experience<sup>17</sup>, is a key feature explored in this thesis. Most plays, at the time, used debate as dramatic material, transforming the stage into a platform for polemics and manifestos that opposed all forms of political propaganda and binary thinking. The puppet became a tool for resistance against several repressive forces such as the state, disciplinary institutions (school, family, prison, etc. ), and political systems (capitalism, dictatorship, fascism, etc). It also became a tool to manipulate ideas and conceptions in order to give materiality to militant commitment by making discursive aspects visible and understandable<sup>18</sup>.

Puppets offered more than a medium for debate, they were also a display

Léopold Leloup dans son théâtre de marionnette vers 1880



# ACT 1 : THE NEED FOR A HERO

19. Highly stylized or formal looking.

20. Museum of Walloon Life. (2020). Online / URL: <https://www.provincedeliege.be/en/node/7410>

of craftsmanship. They looked both familiar and hieratic<sup>19</sup>, and were carved completely out of wood. Gradually their heads, limbs and armour became more refined. Simplicity in the play and intricacy in the woodwork were key. It was from these ordinary puppets that Tchanchès arose. The comic hero who would become a symbol of Wallonia and its people<sup>20</sup>.

22.  
Gross, Joan. (2003)  
(p. 3)

By 1899, Rodolphe de Warsage counted 50 puppet theaters in the working class neighborhoods of Liège (de Warsage 21). Four of them were on the 200-yard-long street of Roture where Leloup had his theater.

## 1.1 : THE RISE OF TCHANTCHÈS

After Belgian independence, uncertainty ran high. Having been under alternating Spanish, Dutch and French rule in a relatively short period of time, being reigned over by distant nobles<sup>21</sup>, the Belgian people longed for a uniting voice. Someone to look to for advice, who stood up for their rights, uniting the city and its citizens. They needed a hero.

Léopold Leloup (1856-1912)<sup>22</sup> was inspired by this national sentiment to create the character Tchanchès. As a puppet master, and owner of the Imperial Theatre in Liège, Leloup wanted to attract a wider and more prosperous crowd to his small theatre at Rue Roture. His theatre's location gave him access to a very different and more distinguished audience. Many of his spectators were "carabins", medical students from the university and

21.  
Gross, Joan. (1994).  
(p. 63)



## 1.1 : THE RISE OF TCHANTCHÈS

23. Kopijas, A. (2021)

24. Kopijas, A. (2021)

The character became such a success that Leloup bought his neighbour's house to construct a bigger theatre for his constantly growing audience.

old Bavarian hospital. They liked to frequent the bars of Rue Roture and occasionally came to enjoy the theatre<sup>23</sup>.

Around 1870, Leloup created a small character dressed in a large white coat who told the tales of what happened in the hospital. Thus, he attempted to appeal to the medical students by entertaining them with relatable tales of a familiar environment. The character would address the students in the room, telling jokes, and performing sketches as an opening-act, before beginning the classic knight's tales he was scheduled to perform. Gradually, more and more students began coming to the shows<sup>24</sup>.

Neighbouring theatres quickly noticed their colleague's success and developed their own imitations of Tchanchès, introducing this common hero into every one of the city's theatres<sup>25</sup>. Tchanchès represented the rebellious spirit and delicious outspoken vulgarity, making him both an actor in the drama itself and simultaneously, a sounding board for all the other characters. He would rebel against social hierarchy, fighting for what he believed was right. He used all the subtleties of local dialect, speaking like the citizens who came to enjoy the show, creating a safe haven for these locals to speak their minds without the threat of outsiders' opinions<sup>26</sup>.

25.

Tchanchès was not the only character of his kind, as shows often included a character that spoke directly to the audience. He was, however, the first character with this purpose in Liège.

26.

It must be noted that he did not receive a warm welcome everywhere. In some theatres, he remained only a secondary character due to the perceived indecency and unconventionality of making a commoner a primary character, while in others, he was granted primary roles, such as the squire of Roland, Charlemagne's confidant.

## 1.2 WHAT IS IN A NAME?

27.

Ancion, J. (2015). Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/thantches/>

28.

Maurice Piron was a philologist from Liège and a Walloon activist. He has been a professor at the universities of Ghent, Congo and Liège, and an academician at the Royal Academy of French Language and Literature of Belgium.

29. Josse, M. (2009).

Online / URL: <https://www.liege.be/en/discover/tourism/discover-liege/history-of-liege/history-of-liege>

Despite his popularity, and patrimonialization, the origin of his name remains uncertain. There are different hypotheses about the linguistic origin of “Tchantchès”, each one interwoven with the political past of the city. It is believed that the name originated from the popular name “François”, pronounced “Françwès” in a Walloon accent. As he was created to represent common society, he needed a common name that was easy to pronounce<sup>27</sup>.

Another proposal, by professor Maurice Piron(1914-1986)<sup>28</sup>, is that the origin of the name is much older, dating back to the time of Napoleon’s conquest, when Liège was the capital of a globally influential country in full industrialization<sup>29</sup>. The city’s mines and metallurgical industry attracted many Flemish, Luxembourgish and Italian laborers. The Flemish name “Jan” or “Jantje” was pronounced “Djantche” in a Walloon accent, evolving further into “Tchantchès”<sup>30</sup>.

The third theory about the origin of our puppet’s name, is that Conti christened the character “Tchitcho”, derived from the Italian name Francesco<sup>31</sup>. Tchitcho simply became Tchantchès. However, this theory is the least substantiated of the three.

The most widely accepted theory is the derivation of Tchantchès from the name French name François. It must be noted, however, that the underlying regionalism and anti-immigrant sentiment may have pushed

30. Gross, J. (2001). (p.273)

This theory is supported by the atmosphere of Belgian contempt for Flemish workers, and Tchantchès’s original role as a character to be mocked. It is even said that in some theatres, people paid to punch Tchantchès’ nose.

31.

This nickname was given to the Italian workers in Belgium.

## 1.2 WHAT IS IN A NAME?

32.  
Kopijasz, A. (2021)

33.  
When more than 50 theatres flourished in the city. Some of them, coexisting very close to each other. Like in the Rue Roture, where 3 theatres shared the same alley.

the Walloon authorities to adjust the name's origin story.

In 1950, the Walloons controlled the flourishing business sector, and resented being forced to provide financial aid to the impoverished Flanders. Walloon regionalists and officials refused to acknowledge a Flemish origin for Tchanchès, an important cultural symbol of the Walloon capital, and promoted the story of his name deriving from the name François<sup>32</sup>. It was also in the 1950s that the spelling of his name, which up until now was spelled differently depending on the writer, was standardized to Tchanchès.

35.  
Ers, J.-P. (2014). Online / URL: <https://www.liege.be/fr/decouvrir/plein-air/art-public/la-fontaine-de-la-tradition-1/la-fontaine-de-la-tradition>

## 1.3 A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

34.  
Sculptural relief in which the projection from the surrounding surface is slight and no part of the modeled form is undercut.

During the golden age of marionettes in Liège (1880-1918)<sup>33</sup>, there were various kinds of Tchanchès. Leloup's original character was dressed as a medical student, but another Tchanchès appeared in a miller's outfit in the Sainte-Madeleine district. This depiction of him, in breeches and a miller's hat, can be seen in the bas-relief<sup>34</sup> of the fountain of traditions located in the Market square. The creators of that fountain, la Société des Fontaines Roland<sup>35</sup>, was based in the

## 1.3 A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

36.

Jurkowski, H. (2009).  
Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/europe/>

37.

Punch in Great Britain,  
Guignol in France, Petrushka  
in Russia, Pulcinella in Italy,  
Hanswurst in Germany and  
Spejbl and Hurvínek in the  
Czech Republic.

38.

Gross, J. (1994).(p.64).

Sainte-Madeleine district, thus used this version of Tchanchès because he was a reflection of the demography in the district.

The surge in popularity of the puppet theatre was not solely a Liégeois occurrence; it was being experienced throughout the whole of Europe<sup>36</sup>. Each European country had its own easily relatable and popular character that linked spectators directly to the theatre piece<sup>37</sup>. Among them we find good examples of how important these common heroes had become in late 19th century Europe<sup>38</sup>.

Each version of Tchanchès represented the unique demographic of the neighbourhood in which he was performing. Every puppeteer gave him his own voice and his own look, allowing him to improvise in a mixture of Walloon and French, contrasting greatly with the way the nobles expressed themselves in plays<sup>39</sup>.

According to professor Maurice Piron, Liégeois philologist, the extent of Tchanchès' role depended on the theatre in which he was being played. Time and time again, he would be seen with Charlemagne, Roland, Tristan, or Geneviève de Brabant and found, either in the crib at Bethlehem or opposing modern invaders at Charlemagne's side<sup>40</sup>, fighting for what he believed.

39.

Dennis Fauconnier,  
Liégeois sculptor and puppet  
player, articulated this during  
a radio broadcast in 2021:

"He[Tchanchès] is the heart of the real Liégeois. He is the spirit, the honesty, and the joy of the city, and the fact that everyone likes him this much is thanks to him being a superhero filled with imperfections. Since nobody is perfect and despite our errors, we can choose to do good, to fight for a lost cause just because it is a good cause. To choose to save those princesses from evil just because it is the right thing to do".

40.

Piron, M. (2008). Online  
/ URL: <http://www.chokier.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchanches.html>

Bas-relief in the fountain of traditions in Liège, portaying Tchantchès in a millers workingclothes



18

ACT ONE

6.

## 1.3 A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

41.

Piron, M. (2008). Online  
/ URL: <http://www.chokier.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchantches.html>

42.

Stasse, S. (2004):  
(p.388). soukeû ; soukeûse,  
n. : The one who head-  
butts.

His suffering was always humorous, and he always recovered quickly from sadness, representing the mocking and good-natured spirit of the Walloon.

Tchantchès' fighting style, dating back to the 19th century, combined imagination and history in a remarkable way. Traditionally, he would slay his opponents with a single terrible headbutt in the chest, "poisoning" them with one formidable blow<sup>41</sup>. This fighting style originated from the Liégeois combat sport soukeû<sup>42</sup>, in which opponents were permitted to use only their heads to knock their opponents out as quickly as possible. This traditional sport is also believed to be the origin of the characteristic Liégeois hard-headedness<sup>43</sup>.

43.

Defleur, M. (1962).  
(p.5-19)

## 1.4 ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL

Every theatre had its own legend and origin story of Tchantchès. He was easily appropriated by each puppeteer, giving him great creative potential. He was nobody and everybody, symbolizing the



Ten books of peddling and popular impressions.



20

ACT ONE

7.

## 1.4 ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL

44.

Gross, J. (1994).(p.62)

45.

Dufour, A. (1932)

This lack of script also occurs in the play *The Four Sons of Aymon* (1932), analysed in the next chapter.

46.

Gross, J. (1994).(p.64)

47.

Piron, M., & Fraikin, J. (1980). (p.8)

underdog of society<sup>44</sup>. Interestingly, the script for Tchanchès' role was very rarely predetermined, while other characters' lines were clearly defined in advance. This particularity is most notable in the scripts dating from before the First World War, before he was inducted into literature and into Liège's patrimony<sup>45</sup>.

Several theories exist as to why his text was not defined beforehand. One theory explains that the authors of the scripts could only speak Walloon, but not write it. Another theory is that Tchanchès' text was not meant to carry as much weight as that of the nobles in the play so it didn't have to be thought out beforehand. It may also have been because Tchanchès was meant to interact with the audience, and the scriptwriters could not predict how the spectators would interact with the show. The oral nature of his lines allowed the performer the freedom to break with the written word of the other characters in the classic texts<sup>46</sup>.

According to Piron, the absence of script created a creative and emotional outlet for the puppeteers, enabling them to transmit their political and personal beliefs, most often linked to frustrations or observations in working society<sup>47</sup>.

Tchantchè's' poisoned headbut against a Saracen - postcard series of Belgian hero's produced by the the Belgian National Work of Defense against tuberculosis.



## 1.4 ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL

48.  
Gross, J. (2001).(p.52)

The puppeteer was usually a local craftsman, who began carving puppets and performing shows to earn some extra money on the side<sup>48</sup>.

49.  
Bibliothèque bleue is in origin a term for a publishing scheme introduced 1602 in Troyes by the brothers Jean and Nicolas Oudot. Oudot produced prints in low quality and small format. Sold with a blue paper cover, these brochure-like products came to be known as livres bleus, or "blue books".

The baseline story of each show often came from the famous pieces archived in the *Bibliothèque bleue*<sup>49</sup>, that contained very famous pieces<sup>50</sup>. However, with the strong representation of the Walloon movement in Liège came the desire to tell more local and personal stories<sup>51</sup>. The most popular stories were those of epic topics about Liège and the city's association with the great Charlemagne.

Thus, the puppeteers began to incorporate a variety of pieces derived from Biblical stories, historical dramas, and melodramas, as well as adaptations from "real" theatre and adventure novels<sup>52</sup>.

One of the first Walloon-produced theatre pieces was *Là wice qu'on bouhe dju lès Ampèreûs*, meaning "There where the emperors are overthrown"<sup>53</sup>. Other more classical contemporary Liégois pieces consisted of *The Nativity (Li Naissance)*, *The Passion (Li Passion)*, and chivalry plays such as *Orson and Valentin* and *The Four Sons of Aymon*.

50.  
The Bibliothèque bleue contained pieces like *Bluebeard*, *Tom Thumb*, *Cinderella*, *Ali Baba and the 40 thieves*, etc.

51.  
Istasse, C. (1968).(p.25)

52.  
These included *Genevieve of Brabant*, *Michel Strogoff*, *a Temptation of St. Anthony*, *The Hunchback*, *Mignon*, *Wait for me under the elm tree*, and *The Three musketeers*.

53.  
Gross, J. (2001).(p.128)

## 1.4 ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL

54.

Dewez, M. (n.d.). Online / URL: [connaitrelawallonie.wallonie.be/fr/histoire/timeline/3-et-4-aout-1312-le-mal-saint-martin-triomphe-des-petits#.YVna00ZBzRa](http://connaitrelawallonie.wallonie.be/fr/histoire/timeline/3-et-4-aout-1312-le-mal-saint-martin-triomphe-des-petits#.YVna00ZBzRa)

55.

Polain, M. L. (1842). Online / URL: <https://liegecitations.wordpress.com/1312/08/04/liege-la-mal-st-martin-1312-noblesse-metiers-clerge/>

In 1312, the craftsmen and merchants of Liège had acquired many rights, but the nobles still maintained administrative control over the city through heavy taxation.

One day, a nobleman came to the Market Hall to collect his taxes from the butcher. The merchant refused to pay, so as the nobleman went for the butcher's cashbox, the butcher

The folktale entitled *La Måle St. Martin* (1312) strongly resembles the plot of *There where the emperors are overthrown*, and was among the most popular plays. These plays talk about the history of Liège and the common people's resistance against the tyranny of the ruling class, and the rise of the bourgeoisie<sup>54</sup>. Some sources, including Anthony Ficarrotta, speculate that Tchanchès appeared in this piece, fighting with the commoners against the nobility, but this was not recorded in writing<sup>55</sup>.

During the interbellum, Thomas Talbot (1885-unknown), the director of Liège's Tchanchès Theatre, produced his own version of Tchanchès' story. He made a strong distinction between "the people" and "the nobility". As an active member of the socialist party, he used his play to launch a campaign for workers' educational and social rights. He would perform his plays at "La Maison du Peuple"<sup>56</sup> in order to attract the biggest potential audience. Talbot's performances demonstrate the fearlessness with which many puppeteers took part in acts of rebellion, as does the work of Victor Verrées (1889-1962), another puppeteer in Liège. Verrées' father was dismissed from the coal mines after instigating a protest among his colleagues.

severed the nobleman's hand from his arm with his cleaver. Having had enough, the artisans and merchants armed themselves against the nobles, forcing them to take shelter in St. Martin's Church where they believed they would be safe.

They underestimated the people's anger and disregard for religion, for the crowd set fire to the church, slaying every nobleman inside.

56.

Gross, J. (2001). (p.260)

## 1.4 ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL

57.  
Gross, J. (2001). (p.89)

58.  
Piron, M. (2008). Online  
/ URL: <http://www.chokier.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchantches.html>

Lastly, Henri Libert (1869-1937) went so far as to write anti-Hitler pieces during his stint in the German labour camps during World War II<sup>57</sup>.

Once Tchantchès was discovered by students and the bourgeoisie, he became the most popular puppet in theatres. His savoury speech was a top asset, and his good humour and banter distinguished him from among all the heroes of the chivalrous epic. Some of the players soon realised that this was a remarkable advantage and hastened to increase Tchantchès' role in each piece. Short comedies were written, in which he was the protagonist, accentuating his uproariousness, and he began to speak in a mixture of French and Walloon. In the stage games and dialogue, his anachronisms, until then mostly unintentional, were purposefully sought after, sometimes reaching a level of flat-out buffoonery. Finally, his physique was pushed to the point of caricature, with his identifying characteristic becoming a large, strange, almost obscene nose<sup>58</sup>.

A puppet's aesthetic depends on the structure made to manipulate it. The Liégeois marionette is characterized by its outstanding simplicity, controlled by a single iron rod attached to the



## 1.4 ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL

59.

Piron, M., & Fraikin, J.  
(1980).(p.22)

As opposed to other  
puppets, no strings are  
attached to the limbs.

crown of its head, giving it a very limited range of motion. The trunk and head of the puppet are made of carved wood, restricting the head to only lateral movement, with the help of a rod called the “fi d’ârco”<sup>59</sup>. Since these puppets had such “simple” manipulations it helped the performer to focus on his voice acting and interaction with the spectators. The exceptions to this structure were the puppets of knights, whose hands and feet were attached with hinge-like joints for more precise manipulation during the notorious battle scenes.

The size of the puppet was determined by the social rank of the character being portrayed<sup>60</sup>. Those that portrayed high-standing characters, such as Charlemagne, were the largest and most intricately sculpted, with adorned armour and a sword in hand. This contrasted heavily with the little commoner puppets, who were smaller and simply dressed, with only the head carved. The puppet’s face was therefore considered the focal point for puppet makers. Each puppet’s expression was painted directly onto the wood, by the artist, with the utmost care and precision, each sculptor having their own distinctive style<sup>61</sup>.

60.

Neven, C., & Haertjens,  
L. (2001).(p.110)

61.

Since puppets were passed from one generation to the next, or from one theatre to another, they were not always repaired by their original maker if damaged during a performance. This makes it difficult for collectors nowadays to distinguish what parts of a puppet were made by a particular sculptor.

## 1.5 TRADITIONAL REBELLION THROUGH “THE FOURSONS OF AYMON”

62.

This thirteenth century chanson de geste was attributed to Huon de Villeneuve.

63.

Dufour A. (1932)

Aymon, brother of Beuves, was distinguished by his chivalry. He inherited the castle of Amblève, located near the Ardennes forest, for which he came to be known as the Prince of the Ardennes. Aymon married Edwige and they had four children: Renaud, Alard, Guichard, and Richard, all four remarkable for their high stature, courage, strength, and courtesy. They were the models of the perfect knights celebrated in the heroic poems of Boïardo and Ariosto, and all their imitators.

Of all the heroic tales, *The Four Sons of Aymon*<sup>62</sup> is by far one of the most ancient and popular ones. Every citizen of Liège has read, seen, or heard of the perilous adventures of the four sons, and can point out the places they might have lived. The memory of these valiant men has been preserved in the people's memory thanks to the traditions and the feudal ruins that cover the Liégeois countryside. The analysis of the script, dating from 1932, will form the base for the hypothesis as to how Tchantchès would have acted and what he could actually have said during the play<sup>63</sup>.

Although the dramatic story of *The Four Sons of Aymon* lends itself well to a rewriting for the stage, the fact remains that the gradual change from the 13th century chanson de geste<sup>64</sup> to the theatre allowed for profound transformations of the original text<sup>65</sup>. These were partly due to the specific constraints of the dramatic art, but the Belgian version was particularly influenced by the German occupation during the Second World War. Theatres were controlled, and only certain pieces were permitted to be performed.

During the Second World War, the German authorities were quick to ban this particular play for depicting the theme of revolt against an abusive authority. It would not be revived by the Belgian National Theatre until after the war. Denis Fauconnier, recounts anecdotally the conception, by an unknown creator, of a puppet specifically to mock Adolf Hitler<sup>66</sup> and

64.

A chanson de geste (in medieval French literature) an epic poem written in assonant verse or rhyme about historical or legendary events or figures.

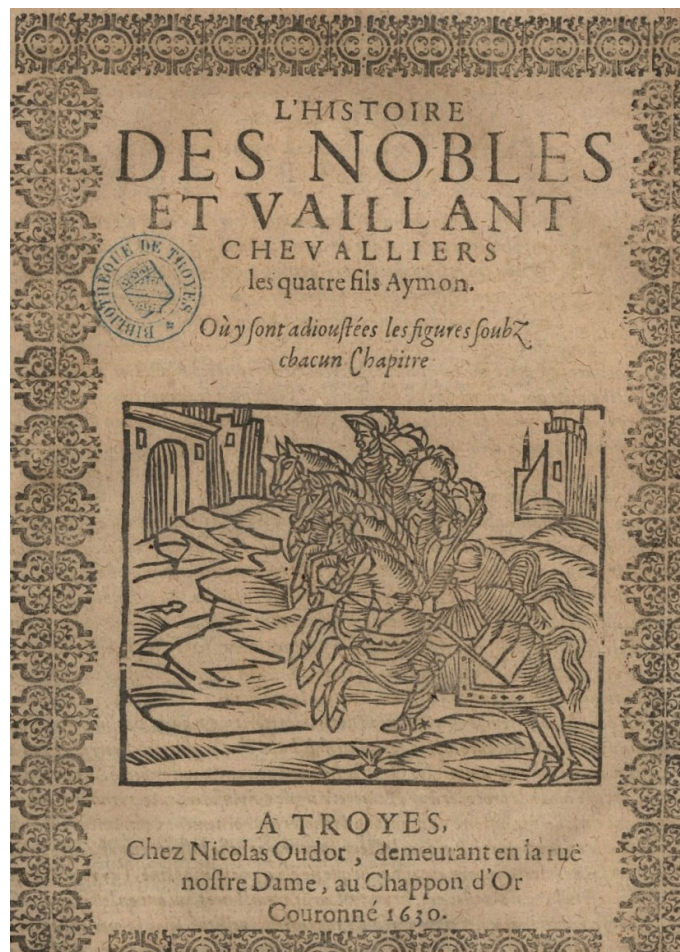
65.

De Montauban, R. (1941)

66.

Denis Fauconnier does not give any further details about his identity.

Title page of the “Quatre Fils Aymon” published in Troyes in the Bibliothèque bleue by the printer  
Nicolas Oudot in 1630



28

9.

ACT ONE

## 1.5 TRADITIONAL REBELLION THROUGH “THE FOURSONS OF AYMON”

67.  
Kopijasz, A. (2021)

68.  
Vertenoeil, P., & Musée  
de la Vie Wallonne (Eds.).  
(2019). (p.17)

This restriction to the  
Ardennes also played to the  
regionalistic sentiment of  
the time.

69.  
De Montauban, R.  
(1941)

criticize the war. This creator called the puppet Nanole, from the Walloon word In-a nole, which, in this case, meant “he has nothing in his pants”<sup>67</sup>. The Germans obviously banned this character from performances.

The plot of the play *The Four Sons of Aymon* includes only the scenes that took place in the Ardennes in the fourth chapter of the original story, transforming the written work into a visual adaptation, telling the story of the four sons in an illustrative way. This reduced the number of scene changes to a total of seven, making the organization of the play much easier and more convenient<sup>68</sup>. The theatre took over the role of the troubadour, showing people the rebellion of the Aymon brothers in an illustrative way. This made it possible to summarise whole sections of the story, such as the brothers’ settlement in the Ardennes castle and their fierce resistance<sup>69</sup>.

The story brings out a more pronounced side of Tchanchchès, according to Anthony Ficarrotta<sup>70</sup>. From references in the source material, it appears that Tchanchchès plays the servant or squire of the four brothers, fighting alongside them in the rebellion. Tchanchchès’ role as a voice for the people continues in the play<sup>71</sup>, even though he does not play a major part<sup>72</sup>. His power lies in his conviction and the confidence he receives from the audience, who can easily relate to him. His rhetoric is powerful and clear; the fight against injustice must never be abandoned. These suppositions as to what Tchanchchès’ lines would have been in the play cannot be confirmed,

70.  
Quote by Anthony Ficarrotta during the interview.  
Quoilin, C., & Ficarrotta, A.  
(2021)

“If Tchanchchès had been present, he would surely have asked the people to show solidarity and courage, he would have supported them morally and if it was possible, he would surely have told them not to let the Germans win”

71.  
Les Marches de l’Est:  
Alsace, Lorraine, Luxembourg, Ardennes, pays wallons : recueil trimestriel de littérature, d’art et d’histoire.  
(1913). (p.620)

72.  
He is at this time still mostly unwritten and goes unnoticed by the untrained eye.

Sculptor and puppetmaster for the Museum of Walloon Life, Anthony Ficarrotta, working on a puppet's wooden head.



30

ACT ONE

10.

## 1.5 TRADITIONAL REBELLION THROUGH “THE FOURSONS OF AYMONT”

as they were never written down. However, Anthony Ficarrota’s explanation of the oppression of the puppet theatre, as a place for freedom of expression, due to German occupation supports this supposition.

This first act has explained the origins of Tchanchès, and his importance as a popular character in Liège’s puppet theatres. He was the means through which the puppeteer connected the audience to the show, allowing the puppeteer to express and discuss their thoughts directly to the audience. As the public slowly shifted from almost exclusively adult commoners, to academics and bourgeoisie, Tchanchès’ role gained more prominence. He gradually evolved from an entirely improvised character, with no predefined lines, to the star of the performance. His values of honesty, good-heartedness and other traits that were seen as typically Liégeois, were kept constant, while each puppet master changed his physical appearance to suit their own needs. Yet, this was only the beginning of Tchanchès’ history. He later became a well-defined figure in popular culture through his induction into contemporary literature and Liège’s cultural heritage.

## ACT TWO : BECOMING A PART OF THE HERITAGE

73.

Piron, M. (2008). Online  
/ URL: <http://www.chokier.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchantches.html>

74.

Piron, M., & Fraikin, J.  
(1980). (p.22)

The First World War led to a new era, characterised by the growing popularity of cinematography, eventually forcing puppet theatres out of business<sup>73</sup>. The traditions of puppetry were preserved by two main initiatives: The Friends of the Marionette and the Museum of Walloon Life. Puppeteers could no longer put on performances in their homes, but had to use the theatre in the Museum of Walloon Life. Most puppeteers were paid per show and given a regular job in the museum's theatre. This set the scene for the second chapter of Tchantchès' history.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a strong regionalist sentiment had developed in Wallonia, and Tchantchès evolved into much more than a puppet. The regional parliament was created, as well as the Walloon anthem and flag, and there was a need for a cultural symbol to represent this newly unified group<sup>74</sup>. In response, authors, novelists, poets and journalists wove the legend of Tchantchès into their literary works. They polished his character and elevated him above the level of a mere puppet caricature. His reputation grew, making him popular even for propaganda and advertisement purposes. As a result, he began to appear in more cartoons and critiques of the contemporary political scene.

## 2.1 BROKEN HABITS

75. Istasse, C. (1968), (p. 19)

76. Politician, lawyer, and Walloon activist who played an important role in the Walloon Assembly

77. Linguist, etymologist and dialectologist

78. Academician and a Walloon language writer. He is considered to be one of the greatest writers of the Walloon language.

79. Piron, M., & Fralkin, J. (1980) (p. 14)

In 1913, a group of activists of the Walloon movement<sup>75</sup>, of which Joseph-Maurice Remouchamps (1877-1939)<sup>76</sup>, Jean Haust (1869 - 1946)<sup>77</sup>, and Henri Simon (1856-1939)<sup>78</sup> began collecting puppets and other precious objects of cultural importance. They had noticed a declining turnout at puppet theatres, due to other competing forms of entertainment in Liège<sup>79</sup>. These three men are, among others, considered the forefathers of the Liégeois patrimonialization process, creating a record of their cultural traditions and folklore. They actively acquired local artefacts and any documentary source relating to ancient Liégeois life and puppetry. Their collection now comprises an impressive sound and film archive kept at the museum.

In 1931, they created a theatre in the museum and invited puppeteers, who no longer had access to their home theatres, to come and perform<sup>80</sup>. Remouchamps instructed performers to give the audience a single continuous show instead of one divided into episodes. This new unconventional format was more suited to the modern public, as fewer people were able to come to sequential performances<sup>81</sup>.

According to Gaston Engels(1905-unknown)<sup>82</sup>, the puppet theatre's decline was not due solely to increased competition in the entertainment industry after World War One. Engels claims that it was, in fact, due to the loss of the theatres' regular spectators after the change made to factory

80. Museum of Walloon Life. (2020). Online / URL: <https://www.province-de-liège.be/en/node/7410>

81. Gross, J. (2001) (p.145)

82. Gross, J. (1994). (p.67) Gaston Engels, another prominent figure of the era, came from a long line of puppeteers, including his father who was a potter, but would perform a couple shows in his home to supplement the family's income.



One of the three first exhibition rooms of the Museum...in Feronstrée in 1930





Rue Roture in 1905

The Creators of the Museum. In the courtyard of the Curtius Museum in 1914.

From left to right: Joseph Brassinne; Florent Pholien; Julien Delaite; Jean Haust; Jean Lejeune; Joseph Maurice Remouchamps; Olympe Gilbert; Oscar Colson; Auguste Doutrepont; Lucien Renard; Isi Collin; Henri Simon; Jean Servais; Sébastien Randaxhe; Charles Semertier; Charles Delchevalerie; Paul Jaspar; Paul Comblen.



## 2.1 BROKEN HABITS

83.  
Gross, J. (2001), (p.91)

84.  
*Ibid.* (p. 148)

employees' work schedules in 1921. Daily working hours were limited to a maximum of eight and divided into three shifts, making it difficult for people to attend consecutive episodes of the puppet shows. They would therefore lose track of the plot and become too frustrated to attend anymore<sup>83</sup>.

The new era of puppeteers needed to innovate to survive, resulting in a substantial change of repertoire. Engels wrote close to four hundred half-improvised comedy sketches, often simply writing the title, choosing the puppets, and improvising for 15 minutes. His skits usually ended similarly, with Tchatchès saving and subsequently claiming a princess, drawing directly from the traditional knight's tales repertoire. Thanks to Engels' campaign to bring puppeteering back to the public's attention, many other puppet masters received government grants<sup>84</sup>. Engels was briefly employed by the Museum of Walloon Life, but was not ready to give up his artistic independence, and consequently left after a short period of time. But even if he would have had a steady income there, he wasn't ready to give up his independence for it.



Gaston Engels, calling bystanders to his puppet theatre on a Liègeois fair in 1974



## 2.2 A CONSERVATORY OF POPULAR CULTURE

85.

Kidd, D. (2017). Online / URL: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0193.xml>

86.

Delaney, T. (2007). Online / URL: [https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop\\_Culture\\_An\\_Overview](https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview)

Popular culture is a combination of actions, beliefs, and objects that embody the most widely shared meanings of a social system. It encompasses media items, amusement, leisure, fashion trends, and even linguistic conventions<sup>85</sup>. It is distinguished from high culture and institutional culture by its association with either mass or folk culture (political culture, educational culture, legal culture, etc.). Tchantchès belongs to folk culture, spread by word of mouth and passed down from one generation to the next, making him very prone to change. Tchantchès, and his character, evolved through the years, losing some original values and gaining other, more modern ones along the way. In a way, traditions can be seen as a ritual, honoring the past by keeping it alive in the present.

The Museum of Walloon Life was the first of its kind, and the museum's founders had no standard operating procedure on which to rely when beginning to acquire artefacts<sup>86</sup>. Hence, to understand the development of a conservation strategy, it is necessary to understand the evolution of the museum's acquisition policy.

In the beginning, the objects, documents, photographs, films, and publications were examined subjectively by the individual founders, as there were no common criteria for the acceptance of artefacts established. Although this caused much disorganization in later years, when the process was standardized and many objects had to be discarded, it was not com-

## 2.2 A CONSERVATORY OF POPULAR CULTURE

87. Damoiseau, D., & Halkin, L. (1977)

pletely negative. This lack of standardization resulted in the acquisition of posters, packaging, and promotional material, created by the *Grand Bazar de Liège*<sup>87</sup>, related to Tchantchès. This collection remains, to this day, a source of academic satisfaction<sup>88</sup>.

88. Quoilin, C. (2018).

For many years, the Museum of Walloon Life eagerly received all donation proposals, resulting in the inclusion of several identical pieces in collections<sup>89</sup>. The efforts to enrich the museum's contents stalled when the documentation centre, used for research, closed, resulting in the museum's closure to the public in 1988. In 1990, the Province of Liège took over the management of the Museum, prioritizing the reopening of the permanent exhibition, the animation service, the documentation centre, and preparing subsequent temporary exhibitions<sup>90</sup>. The museum's puppet theatre reopened under the care of Adrien Dufour, whose traditionalist approach of the artform was a perfect fit with the expectations of the museum<sup>91</sup>. Today, the renovated Museum of Walloon Life extends its field of ethnographic analysis to the present, without compromising the sources of the culture it immortalizes within its walls.

89. Items whose condition was often questionable were accepted, including puppets and other objects mentioned in certain inventory sheets as "worm-eaten", "incomplete" or "in poor condition". This accumulation of degraded and incomplete artefacts resulted in an unrealistically large collection of objects.

90. During this period, the collections were expanded by random donations, without any acquisition policy guiding the acceptance of artefacts.

91. Gross, J. (2001), (p.98)

## 2.3 FROM STAGE TO DISPLAY.

92.

Algarra-Delgado, J. E.,  
& López-Cuenca, J. M.  
(2020), (p.471)

Patrimonialization is a process by which a material or immaterial element becomes a constitutive part of a community's identity, imbuing said element with meaning and significance.

A challenge arose when the museum had to select the artefacts to incorporate into the Walloon patrimony<sup>92</sup>, and how to define the concept of patrimony itself. Cécile Quoïlin, curator of the Museum of Walloon Life, was able to shed some light on the subject<sup>93</sup>. This means making an object or occurrence an official part of the popular culture and shared history of a specific group.

The museum now employs a list of selection criteria, which must be met, to determine the suitability of an object to be added to the patrimony. This policy is a crucial part of all collection management. This process is summarised by two main questions. The first question is “Why do we collect?” and the second one is “What physical facilities and resources do we have to adequately maintain the collections?”. The answers to these questions guide the acquisition and inclusion of new pieces to the collection.

The inventories, set up systematically since 2015, allow the identification of gaps and facilitate the initiation of calls for relevant donations or purchases. The selection criteria, which are compatible with the museum's goals and collections, provide a solid framework for reflection prior to any new entry into the Museum of Walloon Life. This list of criteria must be fulfilled to qualify for integrating the collection. The first stage of the process of patrimonialization consists in responding to the museum's call new and specific artefacts. The artefact must then meet the expectations and

93.

Quoïlin, C. (2018).



The world of puppets, part of the permanent exhibition in the Musée de la Vie Wallonne



## 2.3 FROM STAGE TO DISPLAY.

94. Delvaux, F., Frankinet, B., Postula, J.-L., Musée de la Vie Wallonne (Eds.). (2018). (p.36)

This might even create the possibility of curating an exposition closely featuring the artist in question.

criteria of the museum's selection committee. New artefacts must complement an already existing collection, or be a rare or unique piece, in danger of disappearing. The museum must also have the capacity to store the new artefact under adequate conditions, as well as funds available for its purchase and conservation or even restoration.

Another aspect to consider is the importance of the designer of the object. If the donator can prove that the piece has been made by a creator significant to the locality, region, or cultural community represented at the Museum of Walloon Life, like Leloup, Danthinne, Bisscheroux, Pinet, Verrées, Ficarrotta or Boucha, it would add considerable value to the collection<sup>94</sup>.

The selection criteria are re-evaluated every six years, in order to keep the museum's collections relevant and of high educational quality. Some parts of collections are abandoned, while interesting items for new temporary exhibitions are examined and gain importance in future acquisitions.

Once a collection has been acquired, it must be optimally exhibited<sup>95</sup>. For a long time, "the patrimony" was made up entirely of these tangible collectibles, to be studied, preserved and displayed. However, the Museum of Walloon Life began to expand their collection to immaterial concepts, collecting testimonies of locals, only a couple years after its founding.

95. Vertenoell, P., & Musée de la Vie Wallonne (Eds.). (Noémie Drouguet) (2019). (p.24)

Let's start our investigation with a cliché. Whoever says "museum", says "glass display". But by putting an object, made for interaction, behind a glass display, do we render it inert? Will it still be able to show signs of its vibrant past or will it have to fully rely on the visitor's capacity of imagination?

## 2.3 FROM STAGE TO DISPLAY.

96. Vertenoeil, P., & Musée de la Vie Wallonne (Eds.). (Noémie Drouguet) (2019). (p.25)

97. Chave, I. (2017). (p.15)

98. Quöllin, C., & Ficarrotta, A. (2021).

Thus, the patrimony exhibited in the museum became the Walloon culture's "patrimoine vivant" or "living heritage"<sup>96</sup>.

The adding of an object to the museum's collection takes away its individual value, as it becomes an instrument of education and part of the patrimony<sup>97</sup>. Interestingly, a marionnette like Tchanchès acquires the double status: a material object, as a puppet, and an immaterial concept, as the different characters he represented in his shows. This creates a cultural debate between the puppeteer and the curator, as the former believes that the essence of Tchanchès lies in his power as a character in the show, while the latter aims to preserve the quality of the physical puppet<sup>98</sup>. A balance must be found between such opposing views, as it will determine what is preserved for future generations.

The patrimonialization of objects is also dictated by budget and physical storage space. Nonetheless, the museum's collection consists of numerous versions of Tchanchès, as every version of the same puppet is unique to its maker, puppeteer, and individual history. The record of Tchanchès' past, and his cultural relevance would be incomplete without the wide range displayed in the museum.

## 2.4 THE GRAND UNIFICATION

99. Piron, M. (2008). Online / URL: <http://www.chokier.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchantches.html>

100.

The name of the composition is unknown.

101.

Issue of 1 September 1921

102.

Ancion, J. (2009). Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/belguim/>

Quote by Maurice Piron.

103.

Ancion, J. (2009). Online / URL: <https://wepa.unima.org/en/belguim/>

The induction of Tchantchès into Walloon literature at the end of the 19th century, marks his elevation from mere puppet to cultural icon. Victor Carpentier (1851-1922)<sup>99</sup>, a Liégeois writer and poet, made Tchantchès the subject of a poetic composition<sup>100</sup>. Tchantchès, later appeared in 1921 in the newspaper *Nous l'Péron*<sup>101</sup> and in the *Bulletin de la Société de Littérature Wallonne* (1923).

Maurice Piron explains the role of Tchantchès within the Liégeois society as: “forging the conscience of a community: he is the face in which an entire population recognizes itself in laughter, a modern myth born from a modest wooden actor”<sup>102</sup>. This recognition was parallel to his success in the museum collection, and two monuments were erected in his honour in the heart of Liège. His sculpted tasselled bonnet drooping, Tchantchès entered the Théâtre Al Borroule in 1964 declaring: “I remain your contemporary forever”<sup>103</sup>.

As he became more popular in literature works, his personality was enriched, and he developed into the ideal Liégeois, fearless and headstrong<sup>104</sup>.

The most widely spread origin story of Tchantchès is the one created by Jean Bosly (1883- ±1963)<sup>105</sup>. It was written in 1939 for the World Exposition in Liège<sup>106</sup>. Bosly worked for Liège’s tourism office and was able to distribute Tchantchès’ origin story using the city’s printing press. His version of the tale became the most widely known and best-preserved, so much so,

honor opening of the Albert Canal.

104.

Fadeux, G. (1938).

His importance as a propaganda and political tool is best appreciated in the political-satirical song by Gui Fadeux, entitled “L’arêdje è manêdje da Tchantchès”. In this song, he recounts his domestic torments and announces his desire to divorce his Flemish wife Trine for attempting to make him Flemish. This song highlights the climate of political tension between the Walloons and the Flanders.

105.

Piron, M. (2008). Online / URL: <http://www.chokier.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchantches.html>

106.

The World Exposition was completely dedicated to the theme of water, to



## 2.4 THE GRAND UNIFICATION

107.

Pron, M. (2008). Online  
/ URL: <http://www.chokler.com/FILES/THEATRE/Theatre-Tchantchès.html>

Although it is the most well-known, Bosly's story contains some inconsistencies. In the piece The Nativity, at Christ's birth, Tchantchès offers Mary and Joseph his stable to spend the night. However, Bosly places the year some 760 years before Tchantchès' own birth.

108.

A smock, a piece of clothing like a long shirt, worn loosely over other clothing to protect it when working.

that it was used as a guide during the creation of the museum of Tchantchès in 1956–1957<sup>107</sup>.

The modern Tchantchès is inspired by the paintings and sculptures, from the second half of the 20th century, where he is depicted as a smock-wearing miner<sup>108</sup>. From this point on, Tchantchès ceased to evolve with his audience, being immortalized in his miner's outfit. It could even be argued that he has undergone a process opposite that of his early years, when he morphed to reflect the audience in front of which he performed. Tchantchès has now become stuck in the past, given a fixed role and aesthetic, after becoming part of the patrimony. Cécile Quoilin, curator at the Museum of Walloon Life, explains that this is because it has become more important for the spectator to have an easily recognisable icon they can look to for guidance, than one who is mirroring them<sup>109</sup>.

The quest for cultural unity is the last concept to be explored. The Harvard article, *A Philosophy of Unity*<sup>110</sup>, explains that unity is an essential part of identity, forming bonds between people, allowing them to relate to one another. Unity, is thus inevitable in a working society<sup>111</sup>, and therefore in culture. People found this unity by gradually starting to use the same representation of Tchantchès, the one in his miner's uniform<sup>112</sup>. This uniformity made him into a strong icon, able to unite the Liégeois people as a single group.

109.

Quoilin, C., & Ficarrotta, A. (2021).

110.

Richardson, H. W. (1967). (p.9)

111.

Richardson, H. W. (1967). (p.10)

112.

Quoilin, C., & Ficarrotta, A. (2021).

## 2.5 NOSTALGIC CRITIQUE THROUGH “WISS ALLANGNE”

113.

Gross, J. (2001), (p.93)

From a poor working-class family, he sought a creative outlet in his uncle's puppet theatre. At a young age, he began helping in Oscar Danthine's (1884-1929) theatre, who would later become Talbot's associate.

115.

Gross, J. (2001) (p.95)

116.

*Ibid.* (p.98)

Adrien Dufour (1909-1993)<sup>113</sup>, the author of *Wiss Allangne*, gives us insight into how a skilled puppeteer like himself, who experienced the decline of rod puppet theatre first hand, felt about puppetry's evolution and that of the city itself. Dufour, who worked at the Museum of Walloon Life, had always found it essential to uphold traditions<sup>114</sup>.

When Dufour worked as an assistant, he did not voice any characters during the play. Instead, he was tasked with writing the scripts as his uncle could read, but had never been taught to write. In 1934, they were often asked to perform at the brand-new theatre of the Museum of Walloon Life, and began performing regular shows there. He famously said “When I play, the puppets practically walk by themselves”<sup>115</sup>. Besides performing, he became a civil servant of the city of Liège after having worked in a local factory. He also played the drums, and gave occasional lessons.

In Dufour's opinion, traditional plays should be educational and serious. Plays that contain too many love scenes, like *Lancelot of the Lake*, are distasteful, while plays like *Bluebeard* and *the Seven Duarves* are too childish and do not belong on the stage of a respectable puppet theatre. He believed that puppet shows should complement children's history lessons, not be performed solely for entertainment.

Dufour came to embody “traditional puppetry” as it is described by folklorists<sup>116</sup>. With the support of the museum, he was able to spread his

114.

Gross, J. (2001), (p95)

In his opinion, puppeteers who didn't follow the customs and traditions were committing sacrilege.

## 2.5 NOSTALGIC CRITIQUE THROUGH “WISS ALLANGNE”

117.

Dufour, A. (1982).

118.

This script is one of the few in which Tchanchtchès has pre-determined and written lines, testifying to a more rigid and pre-conceived playing style, leaving less or almost no space for improvisation.

119.

He later criticises the changes in Liège's society, and expresses his relief that the Outremeuse district has remained somewhat preserved.

120.

A huge contrast to his original purpose, which was to connect with the struggles of the people and unite them.

message and his views on puppetry. However, he was also forced to comply with rules and formal constraints set by the museum. His shows almost exclusively attracted an audience that was interested in maintaining traditional puppetry, which suited him perfectly. Dufour, wanting to uphold the values of traditional puppetry, was responsible for the eventual confinement of Tchanchtchès to his miner's outfit and character.

Wiss Allangne's<sup>117</sup> main character is Tchanchtchès<sup>118</sup>. He returns to his old neighbourhood. While taking a walk, he notices many changes and encounters several different characters in the streets. These characters treat him like a complete stranger, despite Tchanchtchès being born in the town.

One of the men he speaks to is a Turc. The Turc comments on the strangeness of Tchanchtchès' miner clothes. Tchanchtchès, indignant, responds that he can wear whatever he likes, for this is his town. Tchanchtchès is suspicious of the man, and learns that the Turc is planning to infiltrate the city. “As if we don't have enough problems with the Flemish yet, now these foreigners want to get involved as well”, he tells the audience<sup>119</sup>. Il-lustrated by this encounter is Tchanchtchès' fear of change, as well as his anti-immigrant sentiment. He is frightened and resentful of foreigners bringing their own unique cultures to the city<sup>120</sup>.

In the original version of *Wiss Allangne*, Tchanchtchès' anti-immigrant views are clearly show-cased, as he blames the bad quality of life of the



MM. Victor Verrées, Adrien Dufour, Hector van Mullen, with their puppets



## 2.5 NOSTALGIC CRITIQUE THROUGH “WISS ALLANGNE”

121.

Through the contrast between Tchanchès' original purpose, which was to unify the people through their common struggles, and his new-found prejudice, Dufour evokes his nostalgia for the loss of solidarity between the working-class community in which he grew up.

working class on foreign workers<sup>121</sup>. The revised version of the play includes a new scene depicting the government's instigation of fights between the Flemish, Bruxellois, and Walloons, while profiting from the situation. Tchanchès' character agrees with this statement, contrasting with the anti-immigrant sentiment he expresses in the original version<sup>122</sup>.

After a drink of Pékét, to numb daily worries and pains, Tchanchès realizes that it is the 21st of July, the Belgian national holiday. The people in the bar agree that, in times of war, unity is the most important thing. They agree that they are all Belgian, no longer divided into Flemish, Bruxellois, or Walloon, and unite to fight against the invaders together. Except for the one difference that this time the foreign invader is a worker within the borders of the nation-state, as Dufour stated in the beginning of his show.

Through the years, Tchanchès has lost his edge. He has become predictable, and his parts are now fully written down. He has given up his wild adventures with Charlemagne to stay at home with his girlfriend, occasionally visiting friends. It feels as if the puppet has become a representation of the puppeteer instead of his public. It is my belief that Dufour's play was written in response to a negative experience he had with immigrants in Liège. Likewise, his nostalgia for the times when puppetry flourished in the theatres of Liège can be inferred through his rigid upholding of the art form's traditional expression.

122.

Dufour, A. (1982).

123.  
Chave, I. (2017), (p. 15)

This research began by investigating the long history of the puppet theatre. The study of the character Tchantchès in Liège, was used to gain insight into the impact of patrimonialization on the creative freedom for his interpretation. To achieve this, it was necessary to examine events from different perspectives and understand the multiple layers that shape the narrative of history. The sources examined in this project include interviews conducted when the museum was first founded, testimonials from the previous generation of puppeteers, scripts stemming from independent writers and periods of time, as well as conversation with the current generation of puppeteers and curators.

The process of patrimonialization aims to preserve traditions and folklore for future generations. This process has, however, irrevocably impacted the way we look at objects from the past, giving them the status of patrimony, and transforming them into instruments of education instead of objects of use<sup>123</sup>.

In Act One, Tchantchès' function within the theatre, his origin story, his clothing and his opinion were analysed. The effects of cultural and political influences on his character were also examined.

The puppeteers' creative and professional freedom was dictated by the changing times and the process of patrimonialization, which determines

the rules of puppetry according to previously preserved folklore and traditions. Nevertheless, Tchantchè's character maintains his sense of right and wrong, using humour as a weapon in his fight for what he believes.

Observing an object, anchored so deeply in local folklore, being used as a tool for debate and freedom of expression is a powerful experience from a designer's perspective. The cultural depth embodied by such a small and humble wooden actor is fascinating. Tchantchè's character has two main functions. First, to represent his people, making them feel heard and giving them hope and the strength to persevere, and second, to act as a rallying point, uniting them through cultural pride.

The art of puppetry is malleable, and would change depending on the message the puppeteer wanted to convey to his audience. Tchantchè was therefore whoever the puppeteer wanted him to be. After his paternalization, his character was limited by the need to maintain a consistent image, in order to preserve his cultural relevance. For this reason, Tchantchè is now always dressed in his typical 19th century miner's uniform, and entertains the audience, not as one of them, but as a representation of the past.

In Act Two, we take a look at the work of collectors and curators. Although it is essential in preserving artefacts like puppets of Tchantchè, it must be remembered that the past cannot always be completely and

# DENOUEMENT

124,  
Quillin, C., & Ficarrotta,  
A. (2021)

accurately represented by museum displays. Preserving the testimonies of previous owners and spectators, explaining the context and use of cultural artefacts, like Tchanchès, are necessary to understand and record their comprehensive history and cultural relevance. This concept of “living patrimony” is an enormous step forward from the mere collection of objects. Nonetheless, Tchanchès’ case illustrates the difficulty of preserving the essence of a character, and a physical puppet simultaneously<sup>124</sup>. One must make the choice to protect the living tradition or the object as part of the patrimony.

Through my research, I have observed Tchanchès’ character and tradition being kept alive by passionate people. His character and history have allowed contemporary artists to create modern puppet shows and marionettes adapted to present-day culture, discussing themes like nutrition and waste to sensitise the new generation in a playful way.

In a time when many traditions, dialects and folklore are in danger of disappearing, the act of preserving them has become increasingly important. In my family we have a saying, “Wie schrijft, die blijft”, “Those who write, stay”, illustrating the importance of writing to leave a permanent trace behind. This project is an ode to that saying, demonstrated by Tchanchès and how his earliest opinions of the past are only to be remembered by those who heard them.

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**Figure 1:** Two kinds of Tchantchès in the puppet atelier at the puppet theatre of the Musée de la Vie Wallonne, photographer: De Cock Evelyn. Liège.

**Figure 2:** Postcard of the Vinàve d'Île street in Liège with the Fontaine de la Vierge à l'Enfant of the 19th century. Author unknown.

**Figure 3:** Pulcinella, a burattino (glove puppet) by puppeteer (burattinaio) Carlo Piantadosi (d.2012), creator of the Teatrino di Pulcinella Gianicolo, located in the Gianicolo in Rome. Photo courtesy of IPIEMME – International Puppets Museum (Castellammare di Stabia, Italy)

**Figure 4:** Different Tchantchès coming from ancient Liégeois théâtres – Coll. Musée de la Vie Wallonne, published in Liège.

**Figure 5:** Leopold Leloup in his theatre at Rue Roture, Author unknown – published in Liège par CEMS Nicholas.

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**Figure 7:** Ten books of peddling and popular impressions. published by Ivoire Troyes.

**Figure 8:** Tchantchès' poisoned headbut against a Saracen, postcard series of Belgian hero's – published by the the Belgian National Work of Defense against tuberculosis in 1955.

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**Figure 10:** Sculptor and puppetmaster for the Museum of

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**Figure 11:** One of the three first exhibition rooms of the Museum...in Feronstrée in 1930, published by the Province of Liège.

**Figure 12:** Rue Roture in 1905. Author unknown. Published by the Province of Liège.

**Figure 13:** The Creators of the Museum. In the courtyard of the Curtius Museum in 1914.

From left to right: Joseph Brassinne; Florent Pholien; Julien Delaite; Jean Haust; Jean Lejeune; Joseph Maurice Remouchamps; Olympe Gilbert; Oscar Colson; Auguste Douterpont; Lucien Renard; Isi Collin; Henri Simon; Jean Servais; Sébastien Randaxhe; Charles Semertier; Charles Delchevalerie; Paul Jaspar; Paul Comblen. Photo: Musée de la Vie Wallonne.

**Figure 14:** Gaston Engels, calling bystanders to his puppet theatre on a Liègeois fair in 1974. Screencapture from the documentary "En suivant le fil d'Archal (I)" published by Alexandre Keresztessy, for the platform Sonumia.

**Figure 15:** The world of puppets, part of the permanent exhibition in the Musée de la Vie Wallonne in 2021. Published by the Province of Liège.

**Figure 16:** Tchantchès and Charlemagne at the theatre of the Museum of Walloon Life. Photographer: De Cock Evelyn. Liège.

**Figure 17:** MM. Victor Verrées, Adrien Dufour, Hector van Mullem, with their puppets. Published by Musées Gadagne-musée des marionnettes du monde.

**Figure 18:** Statue of a woman with puppet. On the front of the pedestal is a bronze coat of arms of Liège. Photographers: René & Peter van der Krogt.

Statue of a woman with puppet. On the front of the pedestal is a bronze coat of arms of Liège.





18.

