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«Le Devin de la Foire»? Revaluating the Pantomime in Rousseau's *Devin du village*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is usually perceived as having only displayed a poor interest in the gestural art of dance and pantomime. In comparison with his contemporaries, like Louis de Cahusac or Denis Diderot, who both thoroughly questioned the meanings and uses of gesture, whether experienced in spoken theatre, opera or ballet, Rousseau never offered in his writings a contribution able to compete with the former's *La Danse ancienne et moderne* (1754) or with the latter's numerous thoughts and theories on the theatrical functions of gesture (often in correlation with music) as developed from the *Troisième Entretien sur le Fils naturel* (1757) onwards. A plausible explanation could be found in Rousseau's *credo* of the primacy of vocal music and its inevitable corollary, the rejection of instrumental music *per se* – even if this is not a view radically different from that of his French contemporaries. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the immediacy and universality of the language of gesture is one of the *Leitmotive* of his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (written between 1755-1761, publ. posthumously 1781).

In relation with the expressive nature of gesture, the aim of my essay is to show that in *Le Devin du village* (1752-1753), Rousseau's one-act *intermède*,¹ the use of pantomime plays an important role in the dramaturgy of the work. In particular, this demonstration will reassess the acting style of its title-role, «le devin du village», the village's soothsayer, since it emphasises gestural language, revealing the influence of the theatrical practices of the théâtre de la Foire, an important, yet neglected source of influence on Rousseau's *intermède*.

The first difficulty arising in such an inquiry is to measure Rousseau's level of knowledge of the Fair theatre and its repertoire: in eighteenth-century France it was a rhetorical stance to despise the *Foire* openly, and Rousseau did not escape this (thus the misleading commonplace still largely held today, that Rousseau, Diderot, and other Encyclopédistes unanimously despised this repertoire). Although Friedrich-Melchior Grimm held the Forains in poor esteem,

My thanks to David Charlton for his suggestions and revisions.

1 The first performance of the work took place at Fontainebleau, on the 18 October 1752; at that time, the work was only written from scenes 1 to 7; the final scene 8, a «Divertissement», would only be completed for the first performances of the work at the Académie royale de musique from the 1st March 1753.

the *Correspondance littéraire* is remarkably well informed on their repertoire. Such ambivalence is even more noticeable in the case of Diderot, who revealed in more than one place his knowledge of and interest for the Fair theatres. If the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* openly despises this lower repertoire, the same cannot be said of Diderot's *Plan d'un opéra-comique* (c. 1758) and *Le Neveu de Rameau* (c. 1760-1775) –and it is worth stressing that these two texts were left unpublished during his lifetime. The force of the prejudice against the Fair theatres may partly explain this, but as Jacques Proust put it, «Diderot a non seulement apprécié, mais [...] aimé et suivi le théâtre de la Foire comme toutes les formes de théâtre populaire, jusqu'aux parades des bateleurs.»² And I am very much inclined to say that the same is valid for Rousseau, even if sources and documents are sparse, and poorly informative at their best. His correspondence does not inform us about any specific familiarity he could have had with this repertoire. Only the *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762) provides two depictions of the Fair theatres. The first allusion concerns the company of Nicolini's acrobat children and the children's company of the Comédie-Italienne, whereas the second describes the magic trick of a *bateleur* (juggler): «un jour nous allons à la foire; un joueur de gobelets attire avec un morceau de pain un canard de cire flottant sur un bassin d'eau.»³ Nevertheless, the text does not mention any precise company or fair, and this kind of show could have been seen by Rousseau during his childhood in Geneva, or later in Paris.

As an essential component in the dramaturgy of *Le Devin du village*, pantomime has been sweepingly treated if not overlooked by commentators; only a few of these have measured its importance. One could even claim that the pantomimic value of this work is indeed more interesting than its purported musical Italianism – this latter point having been recently thoroughly questioned.⁴ Concerning *Le Devin*, it is worth mentioning that most relevant commentaries have localized the pantomimic interest of the work in its final scene, a «Divertissement» conceived, according to Rousseau, «pour être en action d'un bout à l'autre, et dans un sujet suivi, qui selon moi, fournissait des tableaux très agréables.»⁵ The

2 Jacques Proust, «A propos d'un plan d'opéra-comique de Diderot», *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 7/2 (1955), p. 173-188; p. 180-181.

3 *Émile, ou l'éducation*, Livre III, p. 437, note 3.

4 See Daniel Hertz, «Italian by Intention, French of Necessity: Rousseau's *Le Devin du village*», in *From Garrick to Gluck. Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. John Rice, New York, Pendragon Press, 2004, p. 225-236, and Jacqueline Waeber, «“Cette horrible innovation”: The first version of the recitative parts of parts of Rousseau's *Le Devin du Village*», *Music & Letters*, 82/2 (2001), p. 177-213.

5 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond et al., 5 vol., Paris, Gallimard, collection Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-1995, vol. 1, Livre VIII, p. 382; my emphasis.

«Divertissement» is made of sung and danced parts, with a mute action as its core, a «Pantomime» danced by a young village girl and a hunter, itself an inverted and mute transposition of the seductive attempts made by «la Dame du château» on Colin.

Neither Cucuel, Pougin nor Tiersot, all eminent end of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators of Rousseau as a musician, paid any attention to the role of pantomime in *Le Devin*. Albert Jansen mentioned only the pantomime of the «divertissement»,⁶ as did Philip Robinson, who has stressed the «theatrical innovations [...] in the printed score» of the final scene.⁷ Other commentators, like Charlotte Kaufman and Cynthia Verba, have emphasized that the use of pantomime in *Le Devin* is a French feature: «*Le Devin* [...] clearly reflects Rousseau's early absorption of the French musical idiom of his day, seen in his use of pantomime, dance and chorus.»⁸ Enrico Fubini's statement is certainly the most precise and clairvoyant, in considering *Le Devin* as «a little opera that has nothing revolutionary and [is] perfectly inscribed in the tradition of the French pastoral [...] it is closer to the tradition of the opéra-ballet than the Italian *intermezzi*».⁹

Fubini's remark takes on a particular resonance when one considers how *Le Devin* had been staged in 1752 at the Court at Fontainebleau and a few months later at the Opéra in 1753, the first time with a final scene made of different dances and airs from Dauvergne and Rameau (probably arranged by François Francœur),¹⁰ the second time with Rousseau's original scene 8. For in both cases, these scenes had been conceived as «divertissements», in order to please the audience's expectations – whether at the Court or at the city.

Yet scenes 1 to 7 also require specific pantomimic actions – as noted by Daniel Hartz.¹¹ Indeed gesture is invoked throughout *Le Devin du village*, revealing the traditions, in plural, to which the *intermède* is indebted. If the «Divertissement» is more closely linked with the tradition of the pantomimic dance, or «ballet en action», scenes 1 to 7 betray more unexpectedly a twofold influence. First they show that Rousseau had experienced, through the writing of the libretto, the practice of the «bas comique» proper to the Théâtre de la

6 Albert Jansen, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau als Musiker*, Berlin, [sn], 1884; R Geneva, Slatkine, 1971, p. 166.

7 Philip Robinson, DEVIN DU VILLAGE, in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vol., London, Macmillan, 1992, vol. 1, p. 963.

8 Charlotte Kaufman, «Introduction», in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Le Devin du Village*, ed. by Charlotte Kaufman, Madison, A-R Editions, 1998, p. xvi; see also Cynthia Verba, «Historical Background», *ibid.*, p. ix.

9 Enrico Fubini, *Gli Enciclopedisti e la musica*, Turin, Einaudi, 1991, 2nd ed., p. 100.

10 Waeber, «“Cette horrible innovation”», *op. cit.*, p. 186.

11 Hartz, «Italian by Intention, French of Necessity», *op. cit.*, p. 230.

Foire. And second, the use of pantomimic music is inscribed, as noted by Hertz, in the tradition of the instrumental ritornellos, more or less developed, and to be found in French opera: «orchestral program music of this kind is peculiarly French. Rameau had provided many splendid models».¹²

What gives the music a pantomimic function? If we understand pantomime as a method by which to transmit meaning – and not just as a search for the beauty of the choreographic gesture *per se* – then this meaning must be, in one way or another, conveyed through a text. It can be a sung text, as in an air whose content influences the composer.¹³ Apart from such implicit invitations to pantomime, a much more frequent case occurs when a *didascalie* (stage direction)¹⁴ is given by the libretto and specifies a gestural action. This type of pantomimic didascalies is characteristic of the libretto of *Le Devin du village*, and it is because of these that the work forms a radical departure from the established traditions of the Académie royale de musique, where the use of such didascalies remained sparse. And as noted by Denise Launay, the engraved score of *Le Devin* (published in March 1753) also contains an unusually important amount of didascalies, even if these are more oriented towards singing and declamation than gesture: «Rousseau [avait] fait graver sa partition avec de nombreuses indications à l'intention des interprètes, telles que: “débité”, “réflexion triste”, “réflexion douce”, “tendrement”, “avec emphase”, etc., et des nuances (fort, doux, etc.)»¹⁵

If we refer to the typology of didascalies as defined by Michael Issacharoff in *Le spectacle du discours* (1985),¹⁶ those mentioned by Launay belong to the type labelled *didascalie mélodique*, «melodic» didascalie. Extremely frequent in spoken theatre, the melodic didascalie is rarely used within the librettos performed at the Académie royale de musique. For example, only one melodic didascalie has been found in Jean-Joseph Mouret's *Ragonde* (Néricault Destouches, Sceaux, 1714; Académie royale de musique, 1742): «RAGONDE, avec fureur», barely more than half a dozen in Rameau's *Platée* (Autreau, Valois d'Orville, Versailles 1745);

12 *Ibid.*

13 For example the air for Discord and Venus «C'en est fait» from Campra's *L'Europe galante*, (Académie royale de musique, 1697; Houdar de la Motte); this example has been commented upon by James Anthony, *French Baroque Music From Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, New York, Norton, 1974, p. 123.

14 The French word «didascalie» is usually translated in English as «stage direction». However, for commodity reasons, and because its use is well-known in Anglo-American scholarship, I shall maintain this word throughout the text.

15 Denise Launay, article *DEVIN DU VILLAGE*, *Dictionnaire de la musique en France aux XVII^e et aux XVIII^e siècles*, ed. Marcelle Benoit, Paris, Fayard, 1992, p. 233.

16 Michael Issacharoff, *Le spectacle du discours*, Paris, José Corti, 1985, p. 87.

Académie royale de musique, 1749).¹⁷ The relative abundance of these didascalies in works like *Platée* and *Ragonde* can also be justified by their comic genre, but their number remains sparse when compared with those given in the score of *Le Devin du village*. The Table 1 (next page) gives the complete list of these melodic didascalies.

By contrast to the case of *Le Devin du village*, the rarity of such melodic didascalies in other librettos for the Académie royale is nevertheless easy to justify: the performative expression of a text *to be sung*, inheres in a composer's phrasing, accentuation, the range of the vocal melody, its dynamics and rhythm: all are elements able to give musical expressivity, just as a melodic didascalie is supposed to do in the field of spoken declamation. However the abundance of these didascalies in Rousseau's score is surprising, for they are even more numerous than in the libretto, and one wonders if Rousseau, when writing the music, had felt the need to complement the purely musical information of the text setting by adding these non-musical instructions. In which case, these didascalies betray a form of distrust towards the French vocal style in particular. This point carries even more relevance when we consider the painstaking task Rousseau had been through with the reworking of the recitatives of *Le Devin*: the first version of these, rejected at the trial audition of the work in the summer of 1752, had led Rousseau to rewrite a new recitative, «accentué d'une façon toute nouvelle»,¹⁸ that is to say departing from the French standards of the *récitatif non mesuré* and more along the lines of the Italian *recitativo*.¹⁹

When gauged merely through its text, *Le Devin du village* displays various modalities of declamatory expression that are much more proper to spoken theatre than to opera. Among Rousseau's didascalies listed above, only two refer explicitly to singing style rather than spoken declamation: «*débité*» and «*Chant*» (Table 1, examples 2 and 8). To these could be added «*à demi voix*» (example 3; although this could also be taken as a dynamic nuance). But on the whole, all these melodic didascalies enhance the particularity of this work when compared to other librettos.

17 «[Platée] *le poursuivant avec fureur*»; «[Platée] *court le Théâtre tout effrayée*»; «[Platée] *entre en fureur, accompagnée d'Iris*», etc. Adrien-Joseph de Valois d'Orville, *Platée* [livret], Paris, Ballard, 1745, act III, scene 1, p. 42.

18 Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, *op. cit.*, Livre VIII, p. 376.

19 Waeber, «“Cette horrible innovation”», *op. cit.*, p. 182.

1. RECITATIVE COLETTE: BOIVIN 1753*, p. 14		
<i>Ferme</i> Mais quelle est donc celle qu'il me préfère?		
<i>Ironie et dépit</i>	<i>Animé</i>	<i>douleur</i>
Elle est donc bien charmante!	Imprudente Bergere, [...]	Colin m'a pû changer,
<i>menace</i>	<i>douleur tendre</i>	
tu peux avoir ton tour... [...] Rien ne peut guerir mon Amour,		
2. RECITATIVE COLETTE: BOIVIN 1753, p. 16-17		
<i>Reflexion[sic] douce</i>	<i>Reflexion triste</i>	<i>avec douceur</i>
Peut être il m'aime encor...	Pourquoi me fuir sans cesse?	Il me cherchoit tant autre fois.
<i>debité</i>		<i>tendrem.¹</i>
Le Devin du Canton fait ici Sa demeure : il Sçait tout,		il Scaura le Sort de mon amour
<i>debité</i>		
Je le vois, et je veux m'éclaircir en ce jour.		
3. RECITATIVE COLETTE, LE DEVIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 19		
<i>Colette a demi voix [DV/BML**: d'un ton timide]</i>		<i>Le Devin gravement</i>
Perdrai-je Colin Sans retour? Dites moi S'il faut que je meure. Je lis dans votre cœur [...]		
[Colette]		
[Aut. L: <i>Tristement</i>]		
Et toujours il me fuit.		
4. RECITATIVE LE DEVIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 21		
	<i>avec emphase</i>	
Je vous rendrai le Sien,	ce Sera mon ouvrage.	
5. AIR COLIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 27		
		<i>D'un air pensif</i>
Peut elle être l'amoureuse D'un autre Berger que moi?		Non, non, Non, non.
6. RECITATIVE COLIN, LE DEVIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 28		
[Colin]	[Le Devin] <i>avec emphase</i>	
Qui vous la [<i>sic</i>] dit?	Mon art.	

Table 1. Melodic didascalies in the 1753 score of *Le Devin du village*.

* Boivin 1753 refers to the first engraved edition of the score of *Le Devin du village*. *Le Devin du Village, intermède représenté à Fontainebleau devant leurs Majestés les 18 et 24 octobre 1752 et à Paris par L'Académie royale de musique le 1er mars 1753 [...]* Gravé par Melle Vendôme [...], Paris, Mme Boivin, Le Clerc, Melle Castagnery, 1753.

** DV/BML refers to the autograph of the libretto of *Le Devin du village*, F-LYm, Ms. P. A. 109.

7. AIR COLIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 33 [Air Colin] <i>ferme</i> que de Seigneurs d'importance, Voudroient bien avoir Sa foi! <i>Soutenu avec emphase</i> Malgré toute leur puissance Ils sont moins heureux que moi.
8. RECITATIVE COLIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 37 <i>Colin. d'un ton radouci et embarassé [DV/BML: d'un ton radouci et d'un air moitié riant et moitié fâché]</i> Ma Colette etes vous fâchée? <i>Colette. Chant</i> Colin m'aimoit ^s ,
9. RECITATIVE/ARIOSO LE DEVIN: BOIVIN 1753, p. 75 <i>Gai</i> <i>posement</i> Il faut tous à l'envi [...] Je dirai pour ma part une chanson nouvelle.
10. RECITATIVE/ARIOSO COLETTE: BOIVIN 1753, p. 76 <i>d'un air empressé</i> Voyons voyons nous chanterons aussi.

Table 1 (continued). Melodic didascalies in the 1753 score of *Le Devin du village*.

On «bas comique» and «jeu muet»

A connection must be made between the melodic didascalies and other didascalies concerning gestural action, or pantomime. I will refer to this second category as pantomimic didascalies (or according to Michael Issacharoff's typology, «didascalies d'action»). This connection starts to be strongly developed in the spoken theatre from the first half of the eighteenth century, and became increasingly important in works related to the growing genre of the «drame larmoyant», itself at the roots of the romantic melodrama. Earlier examples are to be found in the Italian plays of Marivaux, and other authors having worked for the Fair theatres like Lesage and Gherardi. From the 1750s, Diderot both theorized and used this new theatrical conception of acting in his own plays where the gesture alone can express as much, if not more, than speech. Eventually, playwrights like Sedaine and Beaumarchais took these developments further, up to the climactic arrangement of the «tableau scénique» that celebrates the eloquence of gesture over verbal dialogue. The case of Beaumarchais is enlightening as regards the use of melodic didascalie in conjunction with gestural action: in the most dramatic scenes, the frequent use of such didascalies creates

the typical *style* or *discours entrecoupé*, where practically all sentences are broken by the constant use of interjections. Starting with the original example of Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (1770), the contemporary rise of the melodrama presents a peculiar development of this style, the actor's declamation also being submitted to interruptions created by the use of short musical *ritournelles*, often supporting a pantomimic action.²⁰

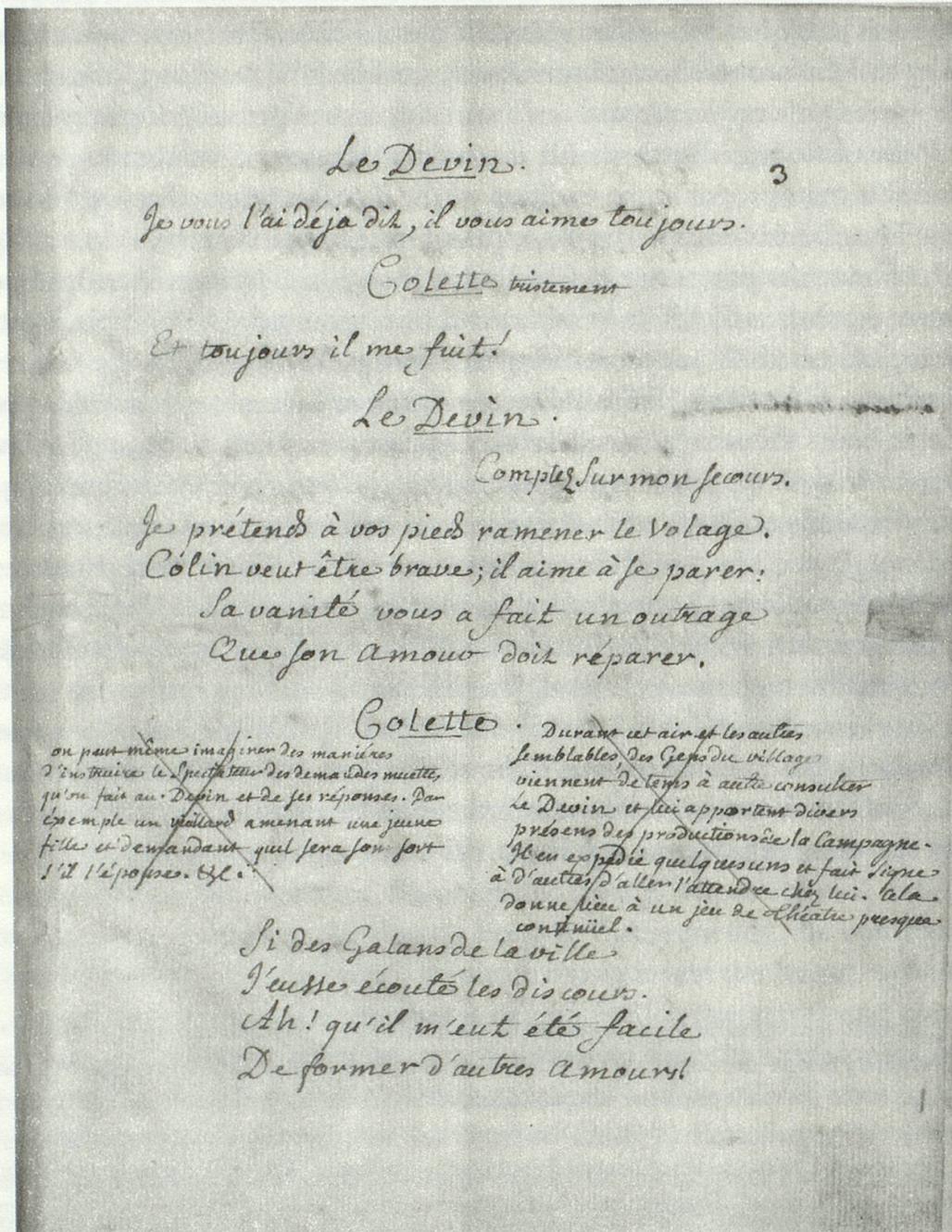
The conjoint uses of melodic and pantomimic didascalies, as well as the growing use of purely pantomimic didascalies able to convey elaborated actions, are typical of one of the most innovative aspects of the French stage, searching for new ways of *acting* (declamation and gestural action). First developed within the spoken theatre, «melodic» and pantomimic didascalies would soon be more frequently used on the lyric stage, as can be seen in Sedaine's librettos, for example. *Le Devin* marks a preliminary yet important first step towards the search for this theatrical new style. Famously epitomized by the Querelle des Bouffons, the critical point of the 1750s is not just about finding a «new» (Italian) music for an «old» (French) audience. It is also, and above all, about confronting two different theatrical conceptions. The seeds of innovation and renovation, allowing the collapse of the separation of genres between *genre sérieux* and *genre comique*, and the new *mélange des genres* characteristic of the «drame larmoyant», were already to be found on French soil. The debates of the Querelle have at least permitted us to reconsider the tradition of the théâtre de la Foire, as well as its musical practices under a new light, giving it a new legitimacy: this was the consequence of the arrival of Bambini's company, whose style of acting was after all not so foreign to the French Forains. Consequently, the confrontation between singers of the Académie royale de musique and the Italian *buffonisti* was of the greatest importance, because it helped French spectators and commentators to reconsider an important part of their own repertoire, predominantly the legacies and potentialities of the «bas comique» and its related uses of music. Practised on the «lower» stage of the Opéra-Comique, the acting style of the «bas comique» played a role equally as important as the impact of the transalpine *buffonisti*. That from the Querelle des Bouffons onwards Italian acting and music have been described as embodying the «new» in comparison to French conservatism, is the typical mechanism of otherness, but this otherness was already to be found on French soil itself.

20 See Jacqueline Waeber, *En musique dans le texte. Le mélodrame, de Rousseau à Schoenberg*, Paris, Van Dieren Éditeur, 2005, p. 44 sq. and 206 sq.

In this context, *Le Devin du village* poses more than one issue: the work was to be very soon judged as pro-Italian – even if from 1752 a few critics were not deceived by its Italian varnish, and immediately qualified the work as musically very French – because its style, musical *and* theatrical, was judged as being very similar to the Italian *intermezzi*. But it wasn't: the original version of its libretto presents unmistakable traits proper to the tradition of the Fair theatres, as these at that time in Paris. This did not escape the directors of the Académie royale de musique when *Le Devin* was presented at Chaillot in June 1752 during a first trial performance. As shown by his corrections and deletions in the autograph libretto, Rousseau had carefully suppressed for the first performances at the Court at Fontainebleau in October 1752 all allusions that would have emphasized beyond reasonable limits the arrogance of nobility against peasantry, reshaping *Le Devin* and suppressing all the trivial elements characteristic of the Fair theatres.²¹

This certainly explains why an important didascalie in scene 2 has been crossed out in the libretto: the circumstances of the Court performance at Fontainebleau could not permit such theatrical practices. Neither was it replaced in the 1753 version, for the performances at the Académie royale de musique. In its original form, however, this didascalie reveals an important wish of the author (see Plate A and Table 2, p. 158 and 159). If *Le Devin* eventually became Rousseau's Italian spearhead, and this at the cost of much artifice, many contrived explanations and a few contradictions, its original version reveals its roots in the «bas comique» of the Foire.

21 As depicted in the original autograph version of the libretto (*DV*/BML; see above, p. 154, note **), the secondary role of the «Dame du Château», and other «Dames de la Cour», yet never to be seen on stage, could have offended the female audience of Fontainebleau – and on the forefront Madame de Pompadour. In *DV*/BML the Soothsayer says: «Leur Amour a propos en ce jour me secondes; | En les rendant heureux il faut que je confonde | De la Dame du lieu les airs et les mépris.» (f. 4, recto). This sentence had been crossed out and suppressed for the 1752 version at Fontainebleau; it is not to be found either in the orchestral score (non autograph) used for the rehearsals of *Le Devin* during the summer 1752 (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, Palais-Bourbon, MS 1517-Z 438); but it is replaced in the engraved 1753 edition of *Le Devin* published at the time of the première at the Académie royale de musique (Boivin 1753; see above, p. 154, note *). Colin's exclamation in the original version (*DV*/BML): «je m'en vais retrouver la Dame du Château» (f. 7, verso), has been crossed out and suppressed in the 1752 Fontainebleau score and the 1753 engraved edition, replaced by «Et je vais pour jamais m'éloigner du hameau.» Another example, that could have had an inconvenient resonance of the *mœurs légères* at the Court, is also uttered by Colin: «Helas! qu'il va m'en coûter | Pour avoir été trop facile! | A m'en laisser compter par | [ces] Dames de la Cour!» (f. 5 verso). Also crossed out in the autograph libretto, the 1752 and 1753 versions of the score just kept «Helas! qu'il va m'en coûter pour avoir été trop facile!»

Plate A. Autograph libretto of *Le Devin du village*, folio 3 recto.

(By kind permission of the Bibliothèque Municipale de la Ville de Lyon).

<p><u>Le Devin.</u> [...] il vous aime toujours.</p>	
<p><u>Colette tristement</u> Et toujours il me fuit!</p>	
<p>[...]</p>	
<p><u>Colette.</u> On peut même imaginer des manières d'instruire le Spectateur des demandes muettes qu'on fait au Devin et de ses réponses. Par exemple un vieillard amenant une jeune fille et demandant quel sera son sort s'il l'épouse. JJR.</p>	<p>Durant cet air et les autres semblables, des gens du village viennent de tems à autre consulter Le Devin et lui apporter divers présens des productions de la campagne. il en expédie quelques uns et fait signe à d'autres d'aller l'attendre chez lui. Cela donne lieu à un jeu de théâtre presque continuel.</p>
<p>Si des galans de la ville J'eusse écouté les discours [...]</p>	

Table 2. Partial diplomatic transcription of the folio 3 recto.

As shown by the disposition of Rousseau's text, the didascalie defining the various silent actions is on the right-hand side. What is written on the left side is not a didascalie, but an explanation of how this mute scene could be performed: a suggestion from the playwright – acting as some sort of stage director *avant la lettre*, and signed with his initials, emphasizing the quality of this annotation as a «paratext». This paragraph is directed at the actors only, and is not part of the libretto as a literary text: it is not even on the level of a dramatic text provided with the usual didascalies.²² Rousseau's annotation concerns different possibilities of *jeu muet* («demandes muettes») favouring *simultaneous* actions: «*durant cet air et les autres semblables [...]. Cela donne lieu à un jeu de théâtre presque continuel.*» Rousseau had first envisioned a sort of continuous background pantomime during the *intermède*. Such simultaneous actions were only going to be theorized and practised in 1758 by Denis Diderot in his essay *De la poésie dramatique* and his play *Le Père de famille*, before finding their most fruitful home in Jean-Michel Sedaine's librettos (notably the opéra-comique *Blaise le Savetier*, 1759, music by Philidor).²³

Lexical expressions like «demandes muettes» and «jeu de théâtre», both used by Rousseau, were not oddities, but referred to well-established theatrical practices, as stated by the following definition from the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1752):

JEU [...] on appelle *jeux de théâtre*, certaines équivoques qui se font entre les Acteurs qui ne s'entendent pas, & qui donnent quelque plaisir aux spectateurs qui n'y font pas sur le champ réflexion, quoiqu'il n'y ait au fond ni vraisemblance, ni solidité, les *jeux de théâtre* ont été quelquefois plus en vogue qu'ils ne le sont à présent [...].²⁴

The meaning of the expression «demandes muettes» derives directly from the widely used «jeu muet» or «jeu à la muette». Already at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jean-Baptiste Dubos was certainly among the very first to use this expression, namely in the original edition of his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719):

22 Similar examples of such didascalies conceived as indications for the actors, and not to be printed in the final version of the libretto, appear in the Overture of Dalayrac's *Azémi*, during which a pantomimic action was required: see Patrick Taïeb's text in this volume, p. 233 *sq.*

23 On the abuses of such «jeux muets» and continuous actions, see Jacqueline Waeber, «Une étude didascalique du *Devin du Village*», *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau et les Arts visuels*, ed. Frédéric Eigeldinger, 44 (2003), p. 203-230; p. 217. For a thorough approach of Sedaine *dramaturge*, see Mark Ledbury, «Sedaine and the Question of Genre», p. 13-38, *Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719-1797). Theatre, Opera and Art*, ed. David Charlton and Mark Ledbury, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, p. 13-38, and in the same volume Sophia Rosenfeld, «*Les Philosophes* and *le savoir*: Words, Gestures, and Other Signs in the Era of Sedaine», p. 39-51.

24 *Dictionnaire universel français et latin [...] de Trévoux*, 7 vol., Paris, Compagnie des Libraires Associés, 1752, 4th ed., vol. 4, p. 1211.

Enfin l'on a vu des chœurs, qui ne parlaient pas, et qui ne faisaient qu'imiter le jeu muet des chœurs de la tragédie antique, réussir sur le théâtre de l'opéra et même y plaire beaucoup, tant qu'ils y ont été exécutés avec quelque attention. J'entends parler de ces ballets presque sans pas de danse, mais composés de gestes, de démonstrations; en un mot d'un jeu muet, et que Lully avait placé dans la pompe funèbre de *Psyché*, dans celle d'*Alceste*, dans le second acte de *Thésée* où le poète introduit des vieillards qui dansent, dans le ballet du quatrième acte d'*Alys*, et dans celui de la première scène du quatrième acte d'*Isis*, où Quinault fait venir sur le théâtre les habitants des régions hyperborées.²⁵

As defined by Martine de Rougemont, the phrase «jeu muet» during the eighteenth century encompasses a large spectrum of gestural practices, referring to «des gestes et attitudes qui précèdent, accompagnent et parfois interrompent son discours.»²⁶ In this general overview, the «jeu muet» was considered (and accepted) as being naturally applicable to the «haut comique»: for Riccoboni *fils*, the «jeu muet» is «la partie la plus estimable dans un comédien.»²⁷ Riccoboni also refers to the «jeu muet» in general. The same rules apply in both «haut comique» and «bas comique», and it is only the nuances of acting that decide of the level of «comique». Yet Lelio's explanation is also restricted to the «haut comique», since his comments are solely concerned with the facial movements provoked by the declamation. Eyes, mouth, forehead and eyebrows are of primary importance, whereas the rest of the body is neglected: «toutes ces façons d'exprimer doivent s'employer en parlant; cependant je n'en fais mention que dans l'article du jeu muet, parce qu'elles y tiennent la plus grande place, & qu'elles en forment la plus grande beauté.»²⁸

The Soothsayer: magician or sorcerer?

But the full impact of the «jeu muet», also taking the body as a whole, would find its most efficient use in the realm of the «bas comique». Contemporary with *Le Devin* by reason of its publication date (1753), the article COMÉDIE, written by Marmontel for the *Encyclopédie*, also illustrates this phrase, but with a major difference in comparison to Riccoboni:

25 Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, Paris, énsb-a, 1993 (3rd ed. 1740) Section 14: «De la danse [...]. De la danse des chœurs», p. 436.

26 Martine de Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale en France au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Champion, 1988, p. 20.

27 François Riccoboni, *L'art du théâtre. Suivi d'une lettre de M. Riccoboni fils à M*** au sujet de l'art du théâtre*, Paris, Simon, 1750; R Slatkine, Geneva, 1971, p. 75.

28 Riccoboni, *L'art du théâtre, op. cit.*, p. 77.

Un peuple, qui a mis longtemps son honneur dans la fidélité des femmes, et dans une vengeance cruelle de l'affront d'être trahi en amour, a dû fournir des intrigues périlleuses pour les amans, et capables d'exercer la fourberie des valets; *ce peuple d'ailleurs pantomime, a donné lieu à ce jeu muet*, qui quelquefois par une expression vive et plaisante, et souvent par des grimaces qui rapprochent l'homme du singe, soutient seul une intrigue dépourvue d'art, de sens, d'esprit, et de goût. Tel est le comique italien, aussi chargé d'incidens [...].²⁹

In the autograph libretto of *Le Devin*, one suggestion provided by Rousseau directly invokes the spirit of the Théâtre de la Foire, through the topos of the «vieux barbon»: the libidinous greybeard desperately searching for nubile flesh. The theatrical origins of the «vieux barbon» derive from the archetype of Pantalone in the *commedia dell'arte*. And certainly such origins were more than in the air for an eighteenth-century educated spectatorship. Even suppressed, Rousseau's original comment relied on a theatrical tradition strong enough to be justified by the acting style of the actor Nicolas Gélin (1726-c. 1779), who sang the character of the «Devin» at the Opéra in 1778, here reviewed in the *Nouveau Spectateur*:

Le Sieur *Gélin* est en possession, depuis longtemps, du rôle du *Devin*, il y a même toujours obtenu les suffrages du public. Les-a-t-il mérités? A-t-il rendu, et rend-il ce rôle comme M. ROUSSEAU l'a imaginé[?] [...].

Le *Devin du Village* n'est qu'un charlatan adroit et spirituel [...]. Il rit lui-même de la bonne foi avec laquelle *ces pauvres enfants* admirent *tous les deux sa science profonde*. Pour les amener à cette admiration, il faut qu'il leur en impose, et pour leur en imposer, il faut qu'il donne à sa physionomie, à sa démarche, à son ton, à ses manières, toute l'emphase, tout le charlatanisme dont les gens qui prennent ce caractère font ordinairement leur apanage. Le sieur *Gélin* a dédaigné de faire cette étude, et le jeu de *pantin* qu'il apporte dans tout son rôle est évidemment contradictoire à la pantomime que paraît exiger le *Devin du Village*. Une chose remarquable, c'est qu'il prend, de temps à autre, un ton prophétique, et qu'il l'abandonne sur le champ. Par exemple, le Sieur *Gélin* dit avec emphase

Sa vanité vous a fait un outrage
Que son amour doit réparer

Colette répond à ces mots par l'air si connu: *Si des galans de la Ville*. Pendant que *Colette* chante cet air, l'Acteur, au lieu de l'écouter avec une attention relative au caractère d'un *Devin*, multiplie les contorsions, les simagrées, il se frappe dans les mains; il regarde l'Actrice dans les yeux, avec l'air d'un satyre que le désir dévore, il lève les yeux au ciel; il s'agite, il se démène, et quand l'air est fini, il reprend un air grave pour dire à *Colette*, qui lui a dit:

29 *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*, ed. Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 17 vol., Paris, Briasson et al., 1751-1765; vol. 3 (1753), p. 667-668; my emphasis.

J'aime mieux être moins belle
Et lui conserver mon cœur.

il reprend son air grave pour dire

je vous rendrai le sien, ce sera mon ouvrage.

et quatre vers plus bas, il le quitte encore, et chante d'un ton tout à fait cavalier:

L'amour croît, s'il s'inquiète, etc.

[...]. Le public peut continuer d'applaudir les singeries du Sieur *Gélin*; pour nous, jusqu'à ce que l'auteur du *Devin du Village* nous démente, nous soutiendrons que le Sieur *Gélin* joue fort mal son rôle, et qu'il n'en a pas saisi la véritable idée.³⁰

The excessive antics, «*singeries*» and other satyr-like attitudes of the actor *Gélin* appear here like an echo of Rousseau's first intentions. This may be just mere coincidence motivated by the fact that from the 1760s onwards, the growth of the opéra-comique and the search for more «naturalistic» ways of playing had a decisive influence on the staging of several works in the repertoire. However it also must be borne in mind that with only two airs throughout the whole *intermède*, the role of the Soothsayer is vocally less privileged than those of Colin and Colette, and the second air, the vaudeville-like «Venez jeunes garçons, venez aimables filles» (scene 7) is also much less brilliant than the first, «L'amour croît s'il s'inquiète» (scene 2). *Gélin*'s excessive emphasis on pantomime could have been a way for him to compensate for this relative vocal disadvantage. But an earlier anecdote, related to the very first performance of *Le Devin* in October 1752 and directly emanating from Rousseau, lends more credence to the above account of *Gélin*'s antics. It suggests that Rousseau himself had expected the acting style of a «devin de village» to be more driven on the comic side. In a letter sent to Rousseau on the 20th October 1752 by the haute-contre *Jélyotte* (who had created the role of Colin at Fontainebleau in 1752 and at the Opéra in 1753), the singer alludes to a critique obviously made by Rousseau after the first performance of the work on the 18th October 1752 at the Court: «J'aurai soin de faire le changement que vous desirez, j'accourcirai le Récitatif de la première Scène et j'avertirai M. Cuvillier de se contenter de son état de Sorcier sans aspirer orgueilleusement au rang de Magicien.»³¹

30 *Journal des théâtres, ou le Nouveau Spectateur*, 15 January 1778, vol. 3, no. 20, p. 191-196. The author of this review may well have been Jean Charles Le Vacher de Charnois, who wrote for this journal between 1777 and 1778. See *Dictionnaire des journalistes. 1600-1789*, ed. Jean Sgard, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1976, p. 88.

31 *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Ralph Leigh, 52 vol., Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, vol. 2, letter no. 182.

A member of the Académie royale de musique, Louis-Antoine Cuvillier *filz* was renowned precisely for his pantomimic talent, as stated by those verses published in the *Dictionnaire des Théâtres*: «*Ta voix, ton geste et ta figure | En toi tout plaît au spectateur; | L'art, d'accord avec la nature, | Ont formé le chantre et l'acteur.*»³² Cuvillier was patently a talented actor, and his acting was in accordance with the house style of the Académie royale, in the repertoire of which the character of a Soothsayer was indeed a novelty. It was not the first time however that a «*Devin*» was staged at the Opéra; several «*devins*» appear in Campra's *Les Fêtes vénitiennes* and one in Rameau's *Les Fêtes de Ramire* (Versailles, 1745). A famous example is Isménor, in Rameau's *Dardanus* (1739). But in the tradition of the pastorale (to which Rousseau's *intermède* is unmistakably indebted),³³ shepherds and shepherdesses are more likely to get the aid of a true magician: and certainly this was the way Cuvillier had imagined the rendering of his role. Magicians are not a rarity in the casts of *tragédies en musique*, the first one being Hidraot in Lully's *Armide*, followed by the likes of Phorbas, the malevolent magician in Marais' *Alcyone* (Houdar de la Motte, 1706). And like Rousseau's Soothsayer, such magicians were also «*basse-taille*»: thus Cuvillier performed the novel character of the Soothsayer by integrating features proper to the magician of the *tragédie en musique*. And as stated by Jélyotte's letter, he took the character of the Soothsayer excessively seriously, and not enough comically, playing his part more as a magician than a «*Sorcier*» (de la Foire?)

In many ways, Gélin's *contorsions* in 1778 were perhaps not excessively out of purpose with Rousseau's first intentions about the specific kind of *jeu muet* required for the Soothsayer, considering how these are clearly related to the *bas comique*. As drafted in the autograph of the libretto, the end of scene 4 describes a «*jeu de scène*» for the Soothsayer (Plate B):

*Le Devin tire de sa poche un livre
de Grimoire et un petit bâton de Jacob avec lesquels
il fait un charme. Des jeunes paysannes
qui venoient le consulter, laissent tomber leurs
présens, et se sauvent tout effrayées en
voyant ~~apercevant~~ ses contorsions.*

This didascalie was retained in the manuscript score used for the 1752 performance at the Court,³⁴ as well as the printed score of 1753. But these two scores also provide additional information. The 1752 manuscript score adds paragraphs [1], [2] and [4] below, while the engraved score of 1753 gives them all:

32 Quoted in Émile Campardon, *L'Académie royale de musique au XVIII^e siècle: documents inédits découverts aux Archives nationales*, 2 vol., Paris, Berger-Levrault & Cie, 1883, vol. 1, p. 161-162.

33 See Fubini, *Gli Enciclopedisti e la musica, op. cit.*, quoted above, note 9.

34 See p. 154, note **, and note 21.

[1] Le Devin tire de sa poche un Livre de Grimoire, et un petit baton de Jacob avec lequel il fait un charme:

[2] L'acteur qui fera ce role doit imaginer icy un jeu misterieusement Bouffon, qui se mesure exactement sur la simphonie.

[3] De jeunes Paysannes qui venoient consulter le Devin, laissent tomber leurs presents, et se sauvent tout effrayées en appercevant Ses contorsions.

[4] sur cette brève il doit rester en attitude d'une maniere Comique

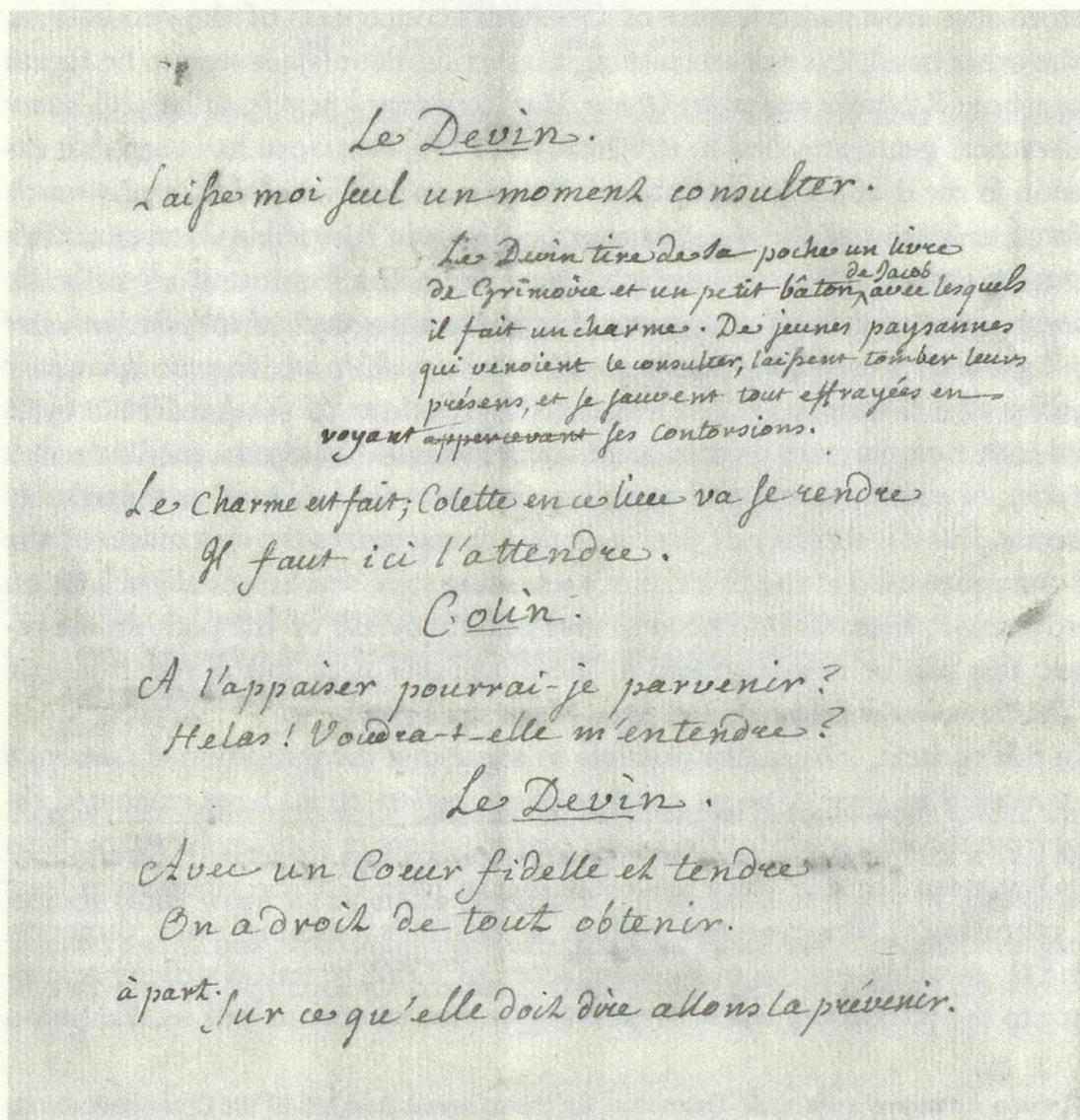


Plate B. Autograph libretto of *Le Devin du village*, folio 5 verso.

(By kind permission of the Bibliothèque Municipale de la Ville de Lyon).

Since paragraphs [2] and [4] concern pantomimic action to be played *during the music*, one can imagine that Rousseau had not yet thought of these «jeux de scène» when drafting the libretto, obviously written for its most part before the score had been completed.

By using the word «contorsions» Rousseau gives a major clue regarding his theatrical conception of *Le Devin*, and the characterization of its title-role. In contemporary theatrical vocabulary the word was heavily loaded, to say the least, as characterizing certain usages in the repertoire of the Fair theatres: these «contorsions» are a major feature of Gherardi's conception of the «jeu italien». On the other hand, it is not astonishing that «contorsion(s)» is *never* to be found in the whole *Répertoire général des Opéras*. But Rousseau knew it, as he also knew the theatrical genre attached to it. Already in 1746, Rousseau had used this expression in the draft of his unfinished *Arlequin amoureux malgré lui*, a play much indebted to Marivaux and the character of Arlequin (shaped by Marivaux after the acting style and pantomimic talents of the actor Thomassin),³⁵ with the following didascalie, itself at the very end of the autograph: «*Arlequin vient armé de sa baguette qu'il contemple de mille manières [comiques], et avec laquelle il fait mille contorsions.*»³⁶ Needless to say, any actor of the repertoire of the Académie royale would have found a stage direction like «mille manière comiques» (in Rousseau's *Arlequin*), or «contorsions» and «manière comique» (in *Le Devin*) as remarkably imprecise. But it is this lack of precision that characterizes the «jeu muet» of the «bas comique» used at the Foire. Since its acting style was essentially reliant on improvisation, there was no need to give minute details of the pantomime required: this can be demonstrated in the didascalies used in the repertoire of the *Théâtre italien de Gherardi*, and even Marivaux's plays.

In this context, it would be possible to argue that the indication «*L'acteur qui fera ce rôle doit imaginer ici un jeu mystérieusement bouffon*» could have emanated directly from the rehearsals for the Court performances at Fontainebleau: perhaps from Rousseau himself, since we know that in June 1752 he attended at least one rehearsal?³⁷ Whoever the author is, Colette's opening stage direction (scene 1), as written in the manuscript score of 1752, reveals a striking resemblance to the phrase «*jeu mystérieusement bouffon*» for what concerns its realisation

35 Tomaso-Antonio Vicentini, dit Thomassin, the most famous Arlequin of the Comédie-Italienne in Luigi Riccoboni's company from 1716 to 1741.

36 *Arlequin amoureux malgré lui*, in *Œuvres complètes. II. Théâtre. Poésie [...]*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond, et al., Paris, Gallimard, collection Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969, p. 955. The adjective «comiques» is an autograph addition, not mentioned in the critical apparatus of the Pléiade volume.

37 Rousseau attended the rehearsal of his work with Friedrich-Melchior Grimm and the abbé Raynal on the 23 June 1752. See Ralph Leigh, *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, op. cit.*, vol. 3, A83, «Extraits du Journal d'Iselin», p. 318.

in tandem with the musical score: «*Durant ce prelude, Colette doit s'affliger, pleurer, soupirer, s'essuyer [sic] les yeux de son tablier, mais que ses mouvemens, sans charge, soient exactement mesurés sur la symphonie.*»³⁸

Rousseau's Soothsayer is in the very footsteps of the Fair charlatans and other sorcerers, as they could have been seen in Lesage's *Le Tombeau de Nostradamus* (Foire Saint Laurent, 1714). As in the scene 4 of *Le Devin*, the sorcerer is given a pantomime to play during his cabalistic tricks:

NOSTRADAMUS

Air 44 (*j'entends déjà le bruit des armes*)

[...]

*Nostradamus fait avec sa baguette des gestes de Cabaliste. Il remuë les lèvres, & paroît agité de mouvemens convulsifs.*³⁹

As we have seen above, Cuvillier did not recreate *ex nihilo* the character of the Soothsayer. Despite the lack of iconographic sources depicting Rousseau's «devin», other information about the costume used in 1752 reveals that this character was conceived on the model of the magician of the tragédie en musique. The 1754 *Inventaire Général des différens habits de Théâtre* from the Magasin des Menus Plaisirs du Roi à Versailles gives the following description for Cuvillier's costume:

M. Cuvillier

Un habit du Devin de Village de taffetas feu garni de découpures noires, robbe, armure de taffetas blanc peint en caracteres magiques chamarrés de taffetas feu la robbe en destruction, il ne reste que les armures

*f[ecit] 1752*⁴⁰

Red is the dominant colour, and the white «armure» (a tunic worn under the red robe) is adorned with embroidered magic symbols. If white was a sacerdotal colour (thus worn by operatic priests as can be seen in many of Berain's and Boquet's sketches), red and black were frequently used for demons (with green), and magicians. Sketches for costumes from Berain père to Boquet fils show that

38 F-Pban, MS 1517-Z 438, p. 1 (see note 21).

39 [Alain-René] Le Sage, [Jacques-Philippe] d'Orneval, *Le Théâtre de la Foire, ou l'Opéra-comique, contenant les meilleures pièces qui ont été représentées aux foires de S.-Germain et de S.-Laurent [...] recueillies, revues et corrigées par MM. Le Sage et d'Orneval [et Carolet]*, 10 vol., Paris, Ganeau, 1721-1737; R Geneva, Slatkine, 2 vol., 1968, vol. 1, p. 182.

40 «*Inventaire Général des différens habits de Théâtre, tant faux que fins et Ustensils en dépendants Servants aux Spectacles de la Cour; lesquels sont dans le Magasin des Menus Plaisirs du Roy à Versailles, le tout appartenant à Sa Majesté Et mis à la Garde de M. L'Eveque Garde Magasin Général des menus Plaisirs Et affaires de la Chambre; [...] en l'année 1754.*» F-Pan, O¹ 3233.

magicians and fantastic creatures are more likely to be dressed in red, or green, this latter colour very usual for the «Furies». ⁴¹ The presence of magic signs is also characteristic of characters naturally dealing with occult sciences, as shown by the following description for two astrologers given in the 1763 *Inventaire général des habits des ballets du Roy par caracteres*: «N° 17 F[onds] ancien | Deux robes d'Astrologues Semées d'Etoilles d'or d'armures de tissu d'or et Caracteres peints». ⁴²

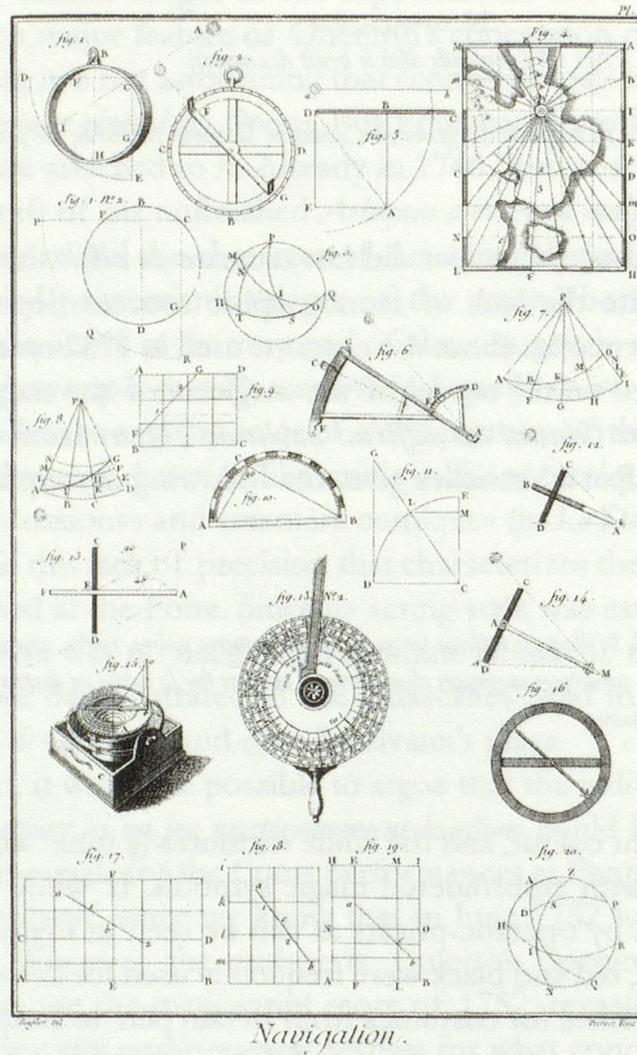


Plate C. Planche Navigation I, in *Recueil de planches* [...]. *Encyclopédie*, vol. 4 (1767). The «bâton de Jacob» is represented under Fig. 12 and 16.

41 For the 1761 revival of Lully's *Armide*, Boquet had also sketched a costum for «La Haine» with the dominant tone of green: see François Lesure, *L'opéra classique français. XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Geneva, Minkoff, 1972, p. 96. A gouache from Boquet's *atelier*, made for the revival of Lully's *Thésée* in 1744, shows the magician Médée wearing a red dress, with rich gold and black embroideries; the cloak is black (*id.*, p. 83).

42 «*Inventaire général des habits des ballets du Roy par caracteres, Premier juillet 1760*». F-Pan, O¹ 3235.

Without any doubt, Cuvillier's costume in 1752 was unsuited to a village Soothsayer. Being rather unique on the stage of the Académie royale, the character of Rousseau's Soothsayer was first conceived along the traditional stereotypes of the magician, as familiar on this stage. Certainly also Cuvillier had as an accessory the inevitable magic wand, systematically used by magicians of the *tragédies en musique*. Yet the earliest document related to the costumes and accessories of *Le Devin du village* and mentioning the use of a magic wand dates only from 1763 for a Court performance of the work: «*Emprunter a l'opéra le Grimoire et la Baguette*». ⁴³ Rousseau's libretto gives unusual details of the Devin's accessories. Unexpectedly, he does not use the magic wand, but a «bâton de Jacob» (literally, «Jacob's stick»). A mathematical tool invented probably in the fourteenth century, the «bâton de Jacob», also called «arbalestrille», was used by astronomers and navigators for measuring distances, heights, and angles. ⁴⁴ (Plate C).

That Rousseau chose for his Soothsayer a «bâton de Jacob» in conjunction with a «grimoire» (a book of magic spells), i.e. one object emblematic of scientific rationalism, and another related to the occult, provides a remarkable nuance in the characterization of the Soothsayer's «magic» powers, depicting a character similar to the Fair charlatans and other travelling healers in rural areas, mixing the magic and the scientific. And we need not be surprised that from the 1752 performances the sophisticated «bâton de Jacob» had been immediately understood as, and replaced, by the magic wand.

From Diderot's *Devin* to Philidor's *Sorcier*

Excessively sumptuous, Cuvillier's costume had an impact on the actor's acting style: if clothes make the man, they make the actor too. However involuntary, this created a comic contrast between the simplicity of Rousseau's *intermède* and the sophistication of a Devin who would have found a better place in a *tragédie en musique*. Confirmation of the inadequacy of the Soothsayer's costume can be found in another major source, Denis Diderot's *Trois Chapitres ou la vision de la nuit de Mardi Gras au mercredi des Cendres* (1753). The core of the text is a performance at the Opéra of Rousseau's *Devin*, to be understood as a critique of the way the *intermède* had been staged for its 1753 première at the Académie royale. As such,

43 «*Programe du Devin de Village, Opéra en un acte Représenté devant le Roy à Versailles le mercredi Neuf Mars 1763*». F-Pan, O¹ 3266/8. Later sources of the Archives du Roi and the Académie royale also systematically mention the magic wand.

44 A thorough definition of the «bâton de Jacob» is given in the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 1430-1431.

it is a major testimony regarding this work, being also the earliest text to comment at length on the performances of *Le Devin* at the Opéra. However it must be taken with caution: as stated by the title, this text offers an idealized *vision* of *Le Devin*, or better, the work commented upon here is more Diderot's *Devin* than Rousseau's.

If Jélyotte's letter evoked only the character of the role, Diderot's vision describes his costume with more precision: «Le Petit Prophète [prit le Devin] pour une contre-épreuve d'un démon de grand Opéra, car il était tout rouge, et il lui cria: "Monsieur le Devin, garde-toi de venir dans la forêt de Boehmischbroda, car le procureur fiscal pourrait bien te faire griller, pour t'apprendre à t'habiller autrement.»⁴⁵ Typically, Diderot compares the Soothsayer with characters he had seen previously on this same stage: because of the red costume, the Soothsayer is assimilated into a demon «de grand Opéra» – a genre exactly opposite to the creation which is *Le Devin*.

Diderot is of course aware of the *dissonance* created between this unsuitable costume and the character of the Soothsayer. The point is made particularly clear in Chapter 3, describing the villagers' feast celebrating the reconciliation of Colin and Colette (corresponding in Rousseau's *Devin* to the final scene). Yet this description is openly presented not as an objective account of the 1753 performance but as an ideal scenic realization as dreamed by Diderot, who points out from the start of the chapter the rigid excess of symmetry of the decorations at the Académie royale: in this final scene «il n'y avait point la symétrie qu'ils mettent dans leurs décorations [de l'Opéra].»⁴⁶ In Diderot's vision the Soothsayer wears a very different costume: «J'entendis quelqu'un sous les arbres qui disait: *Venez, jeunes garçons, venez, aimables filles* [...]. Ce quelqu'un était le Devin, mais il ne portait plus l'habit rouge.»⁴⁷ Unfortunately for us, the description stops here, and the archives of the Académie royale do not contain any trace of information on the Devin's costume for the 1753 première at the Opéra, if we except the mention of a «rabat de gaze» (a gauze collar).⁴⁸ Yet this accessory would hardly be found in a ceremonial costume. Rather, it would be found in contemporary costume styles, adorning the collar of a frock coat, for example. A later description of his costume, found in the «*Programme du Devin de Village, Opéra en un acte Représenté devant le Roy à Versailles le mercredi Neuf Mars 1763*» shows that the Soothsayer (performed by Joseph Caillot) was by then dressed «en habit de ville»:

45 Denis Diderot, *Trois Chapitres ou la vision de la nuit de Mardi Gras au mercredi des Cendres*, in *Œuvres*, ed. Laurent Versini, 5 vol., Paris, Laffont, collection Bouquins, 1994-1997, vol. 4, p. 143.

46 *Id.*, p. 146.

47 *Id.*, p. 147.

48 «*Magasin de Modes [Nattier] | Etat des Memoires compris | dans la liquidation | octobre 1752. Jusqu'au dernier mars 1753. | Pour fournitures faites depuis le premier octobre | 1752. jusqu'au dernier mars 1753*». F-Pan, AJ¹³ 32/4.

Chapeau a haute forme de Satin noir orné de ruban cerise, un rabas de dentelle:

Perruque ronde noire

Bas bruns, souliers noirs avec pieces rouges rabatues.

a Emprunter a l'opéra le Grimoire et la Baguette.

les Bas et Souliers a fournir a neuf et serviront une 2^{de}. fois

habit, veste grande culotte de Satin brun orné de ruban cerise,

manteau de Satin noir orné de ruban cerise, des gros boutons cerise;

le tout doublé de toille noire et Brune⁴⁹

Interestingly, this contemporary costume bears a slight yet distinctive sign betraying the Soothsayer: the red ornaments of the hat, the shoes, the coat and the buttons. For the rest, this costume would have been perfectly suited for a «magister», or a «Tabellion de village», the latter especially being a character that had started to be popularized from the 1760s in many opéras-comiques. And the description also mentions a «rabat de dentelle», an accessory identical to the gauze collar required for the costume of Cuvillier in 1753 at the Académie royale. Would this mean that from March 1753, Cuvillier had been wearing a costume already similar to the one described in 1762? And if so, why then did Diderot mention the red costume in his text?

It is most unlikely that Diderot would have attended the 1752 performances at the Court, but he could have been informed by Rousseau himself of Cuvillier's red costume. At this time, his relations with Rousseau were still close and friendly; and taking into account the peculiar nature of the *Trois Chapitres*, a text freely recreating *Le Devin* according to Diderot's own tastes, one can imagine that he conflated what he had heard from the 1752 performances and what he had seen at the Opéra in 1753. In any case, Diderot's text echoes Rousseau's criticisms of Cuvillier's acting style and costume. And if the gauze collar is evidence of a radical change of costume, it may also signify that Rousseau's comments had been followed by the actor.

Another hypothesis, still following Diderot's text, would have been that from 1753 the Soothsayer might have worn two different costumes, dressed as a magician with the dominant tone of red during scenes 1 to 7, and reappearing in the final Divertissement under the more normal costume of a villager. But this cannot be verified in any source or document related to the performances of *Le Devin* in 1753. Furthermore, all other sources available for later performances of the work at the Opéra or the Court always mention only one costume for the Soothsayer.

49 «Programme du Devin de Village, Opéra en un acte Représenté devant le Roy à Versailles le mercredi Neuf Mars 1763». F-Pan, O¹ 3266/8.

François André Danican Philidor's *Le Sorcier*, comédie lyrique in two acts (libretto by Poinciset, 1764) will provide the conclusion of this overview on Rousseau's Soothsayer, his acting style and his external appearance. The character of Julien, who adopts the disguise of a sorcerer, offers a sort of synthesis between Rousseau's Soothsayer and the commonly held view of a magician. Julien's external appearance as a sorcerer has been carefully described in the libretto by Poinciset: «*Julien travesti en Dervis indien, mais sans charge, avec une robe qui cache son premier habit, un bonnet auquel tient une barbe. Il porte à la main une baguette.*»⁵⁰

The comic effect of this scene is based on a parodic effect, stressing the fakeness of Julien's disguise. The neutral elements defining his sorcerer's condition are the hat, the beard and the magic wand. The grandiloquent aspect is accentuated by the purportedly foreign origin of the disguise, and Julien's robe, sufficiently long to hide his villager's costume, must certainly have been reminiscent of the richly brocaded fabrics used for magicians and priests of tragedies. On the other hand the detail, «*sans charge*» warns against any kind of excessive acting; after all, the disguise and the sorcerer's attributes reveal enough of the hoax. It would be of course tempting to view in Julien's disguise a possible clue about the costume of Rousseau's Soothsayer, as possibly described by Diderot in 1753: first appearing as a grandiloquent magician or a demon «*de grand Opéra*», and then dressed as a villager for the celebration of Colin and Colette's reconciliation.

Whatever the truth may have been, the foreign exotic quality stressed by Julien's disguise reminds us that Rousseau's Soothsayer had been indeed a novel character on the stage of the Académie royale: as novel and as foreign and exotic for this stage as Bambini's Italian *Bouffons*. Yet *Le Devin du village* did not bring a «*new*» character onto an «*old*» stage, since the character of the Soothsayer is himself the heir of a venerable comic tradition finding its origins in the *commedia dell'arte*. Certainly the most important legacy of this modest work lies much less in its musical style, for it is a well-established fact by now that *Le Devin* owes far more to the French tradition than to the Italian one. It seems then more appropriate to assess its influence through its theatrical legacy. Parallel to the Bouffons's arrival, *Le Devin* helped prepare for the renewal of a large part of the French repertoire by bringing the «*bas comique*» to the forefront alongside the «*haut comique*», whereas earlier this would not have been expected, or even permitted.

50 François André Danican Philidor, *Le Sorcier, comédie lyrique en deux actes*, Paris, Chez M^r. De la Chevardiere [...] et aux adresses ordinaires de musique, [1764], act II, scene 1, p. 80.