

THE COACHMAN'S BARE RUMP: DOCUMENT #1

Archives nationales, Paris

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Procès-verbal dated 22 January 1763

The year 1763, the twenty-second of January, at one o'clock in the morning, I, Antoine Joachim Thiot, Commissioner of Police and Lawyer at the Chatelet, etc., having been sent for, arrived at the home of Mylord Christophe-Louis Pajot de Villers, chevalier, in Taranne Street, St-Germain suburb, St-Sulpice parish. There, having entered a room on the mezzanine looking out on the street, I found the Sieur de Villers, who lives there. He told me that yesterday he had had performed, on a stage erected in his house, two entertainments, or plays, one of which was *The Village Fortune-Teller* [an opera by Jean-Jacques Rousseau], and the other *The Bohemian* [most likely a parody of a recent comic opera]. The spectacles began at 7:30 in the evening, and finished at ten. In attendance, among others, were the Prince of Marsan, the Prince of Salm, the Count of Landron, the Marquise of Asfeldt, the Countess of Humbeck, the Countess of Albert, the Count of Joyeuse, the Marquis of Soyecourt, and other people of quality. As soon as the performance was done, the curtain was lowered. Several people among those mentioned left, while others were still there. The coachman of the said Sieur de Villers decided to climb up on the stage, undo his trousers and turn his back to the curtain, with the intention of displaying his bare rump to those who were still in the room. At this point, the said Capolin, a negro aged thirteen years, raised the curtain so that those remaining in the hall saw the nude posterior of the coachman, who was bent over in such a way that his rear end stuck out towards the audience. He even slapped his backside loudly with his hands to call attention to himself. As a result, all of those still in the room saw, much to their astonishment, an act of tremendous impudence, which so greatly revolted them that they left the room immediately, complaining of the terrible scandal. At this moment the said Sieur de Villers was walking someone to the front door and was on the staircase when someone came to tell him of this insult to him, his house, and his guests. He ran immediately back to the stage where he found the said coachman, another servant, and the said young negro. They all denied any involvement in the incident, and so the said Sieur de Villers turned to those still in the room who had seen the incident and who were still present. These people, including Mr. and Mrs. Coppin, Mrs. Bar, Mr. Liepur, Mr. L'Hutel and others, confirmed the incident. With this, the said Sieur de Villers sent for me in order to swear a complaint and to verify the incident via several declarations and by the admissions of the guilty parties, and to punish those found guilty by sending them to prison, as he has requested me to do. To this end he told me he had also called for a squadron of the guard who arrived right after I did. We entered the house together, and the sergent of the squadron told me in effect that he had also come at the request of the Sieur de Villers.

Signed: Thiot, Pajot de Villers

I also discovered in the said room Madeleine Roussin, wife of Mr. Louis-Francois Coppin, Receiver of the King's Farms [i.e., a royal tax collector], Miss Reine-Elisabeth Coppin and Miss Victoire Coppin, her daughters, all of whom live on Chanvrerie Street, St-Eustache parish. They told me that they had attended the plays mentioned above, and when the coachman of the Sieur de Villers, who was on the stage, presented his naked rear end, they were among the people still in the room. Mrs. Coppin, for her part, could clearly see a man who had lowered his trousers, stuck out his bare rump, and slapped it with his hands to draw attention. Her daughters, for their part, stated that they had not seen this nudity, but had heard the slapping sounds and taken them to be applause for the play. They noted that the following people were still in the room when this incident took place: the Countess of Humbeck, the Marquise of Albert, the Marquise of Cacardo, Mrs. Dumont, Mr. L'Hutel, Mr. Liepur, Mrs. Bar, and others they didn't know. The said Mrs. Coppin and her daughters withdrew themselves immediately after this indecency occurred, at which point they saw the Sieur de Villers become furious when he heard the news of what had happened. They heard that others who had been in the room also withdrew, indignant. As for themselves, they had remained with Mr. Coppin, their husband and father, at the request of the Sieur de Villers so that they could make the present statement.

Signed: M. Roussin; R.E. Coppin; V. Coppin

After which the said Sieur de Villers had his coachman appear before me. The latter said his name was Nicolas Dandeli, also known as Chambeli, living in the house where I was. The Sieur de Villers also called before me Jean-Baptiste Lesan, also known as St-Jean, a servant of the said Sieur de Villers, and the said Capolin, of the negro nation, a domestic in the service of the said Sieur de Villers, both of them also living in the same house. The three of them stated that the said coachman, who had climbed up on his master's stage, being in the house last night after the spectacle, said to the afore-mentioned negro, who was also on the stage, that he had just seen a comedy, and that now he was going to see another. At that instant he undid his trousers, lowered them, and showed his naked rear to this negro who, for his part, raised the curtain of the theater in such a way that the coachman was perceived in this state by the ladies and other persons still in the room. He (Capolin) had the misfortune to succumb to this unfortunate idea, which he now recognizes was terribly indecent and for which he greatly repents. And the said Lesan told me that he was at that moment on the stage putting out the candles that had been lit for the show when he heard the coachman propose this action. But he did not see what the coachman did. He did see the curtain go up without knowing who did it. And the said Capolin said that the said coachman asked him if he had seen the comedy, and then showed him his rear while saying: "Hey, here's a show for you!" But the said Capolin did not see if the coachman's rump was uncovered. He then immediately raised the curtain, without really knowing what he was doing. Then he heard a clapping sound from the coachman, but he doesn't know if the coachman was clapping his hands together, or hitting his rear end with them. And all three told us that there were at the moment ladies and other persons in the said room with the stage. And that immediately

their master appeared on the stage, in a great fury, asking all three of them who had shown their rear end. But they hid the truth from him by saying that they didn't know.

Signed: Dandeli-Chambli; J.B. Lefan

Upon which I handed over custody of the said Dandeli, coachman, at the request of the Sieur de Villers, to the said Cottin, Sergent of the Guard, there present, who took charge of leading him off to prison. As for the other two afore-mentioned domestics, they stayed in the residence of the said Sieur de Villers, who told me he did not require the imprisonment of the young negro, in spite of his complicity in the event in question, given his young age and that he (the Sieur de Villers) keeps him at the request of Miss Rouillé, sister of the deceased Mr. Rouillé, governor of Martinique [French colony in the Caribbean] who urgently asked him to take Capolin as an act of charity. All of which I have recorded in the present investigative report

Signed: Pajot de Villers; Cottin; Thiot