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Denis Herlin

A bibliographical imbroglio: Books 1 and 2 of Couperin's *Pièces de clavecin*

WHEN he published his first book of *Pièces de clavecin* in 1713, François Couperin was 45 years old. He had held organist posts at Saint-Gervais since 1685 and at the Chapelle Royale since 1693. He enjoyed an excellent reputation at the court, not only because of his official position there, but also because of his work as 'professor of composition and [continuo] accompaniment to the late Duke of Burgundy,'¹ Louis XIV's grandson, who had died tragically in 1712 at the age of 29. Couperin was also the teacher of 'six princes or princesses of the royal household,'² among them Louis-Alexandre de Bourbon, comte de Toulouse, much of whose magnificent collection of music is preserved in the music department of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. He additionally taught a number of private individuals in Paris. Yet although his name occasionally appeared in song books such as the monthly *Recueils d'airs sérieux et à boire* issued by Christophe Ballard since 1695, he did not become widely known until the publication of his three volumes of motets that had been sung in the king's presence, issued by Ballard in 1703, 1704 and 1705.

Thus the appearance of Couperin's first two books of *Pièces de clavecin*, respectively in 1713 and 1717, marked a symbolic and decisive step not only in Couperin's career but in the evolution of French harpsichord music, as concerns both the music itself (its form, style and notation) and its presentation (format, page layout and printing). As David Fuller observes, Couperin 'revolutionized the art of writing for harpsichord; thereafter no one escaped the impact of his ideas.' Fuller adds that Couperin's revolution 'liberated harpsichord music from the tyranny of the dance' and 'replaced those noble dances

inherited from the lutenists with pieces freely invented in order to exploit new musical ideas, to explore the descriptive potential of music, and simply to serve some practical or pedagogical purpose.'³

Above and beyond the many innovations that distinguish these two books, they occupy a singular place in the *clavecin* repertory. In all, 72 exemplars of Book 1 and 52 of Book 2 survive in public collections in Europe and America—more than of any other French harpsichord publication. These figures, which exclude those in private collections,⁴ are notably higher than for Rameau's *Pièces de clavecin* (1724) and *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin* (1729–30), of which 46 and 49 copies survive respectively.⁵ Such exceptional figures offer evidence of the tremendous influence exercised by Couperin's compositions, not only in France but elsewhere in Europe.

Further proof that Couperin's reputation extended beyond the French borders may be found in a letter from the mathematician Pierre-Rémond de Montmort to the English merchant and musical connoisseur John Taylor on 28 May 1717, at the time of the appearance of Book 2:

I include a volume of *Pièces de clavecin*, highly esteemed in this country, which has just appeared. It will be of use to your daughters who, I gather, play very well ... I would have sent you the volume by Couperon [*sic*] after having it bound, but M. Lully [Loeillet], who has charge of it, would have found it less easy to carry.⁶

Curiously, none of Couperin's four harpsichord books became the objects of pirated editions, unlike Jean Henry d'Anglebert's *Pièces de clavecin* (1689), for example, or Gaspard Le Roux's (1705), which

were pirated by Estienne Roger in Amsterdam, the first in 1704, the second in 1707–8;⁷ and John Walsh was to pirate Rameau's *Pièces de clavecin*, *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin* and *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* as well as the second book by Duphy during the 1750s and 60s.⁸ As far as Roger is concerned, this can be explained by a growing lack of interest in French harpsichord music published after 1710. Doubtless for the same reason, Walsh published nothing from this repertory between 1705 and 1750.⁹ The complexity of Couperin's engraving and the size of these volumes, discussed below, may also have been a deterrent, dissuading these and other foreign 'pirates' from engaging in their usual skulduggery.

In his edition of Couperin's *Pièces de clavecin* (Heugel, 1969–72), Kenneth Gilbert identified eight impressions of Book 1 and seven of Book 2.¹⁰ In preparing a new critical edition of Couperin's harpsichord music for Bärenreiter, I discovered 16 impressions of Book 1 and 15 of Book 2—almost twice as many. The present article demonstrates how these books were modified over the course of their numerous impressions, thereby opening a window onto how French printed music circulated during the first half of the 18th century and revealing some unexpected aspects of Couperin's life and character.

The engraving of Books 1 and 2

If we except d'Anglebert's *Pièces de clavecin* (1689), whose engraving was remarkably well executed,¹¹ the engraving of Couperin's first two books surpasses all harpsichord publications since the time of Chambonnières's two collections in 1670. Couperin entrusted the engraving to François Du Plessy, to whom we owe numerous editions issued between 1711 and 1740. The quality of Du Plessy's engraving is exceptional in several ways and surely contributed to the success of Couperin's first two books. Du Plessy would also engrave the three *Leçons de ténèbres* (1714) and the fourth book of *Pièces de clavecin* (1730). Moreover, as mentioned in my preface to the new Bärenreiter edition,¹² Couperin's first book represented Du Plessy's Opus 1 (the first extensive project he undertook as an engraver), although the continuo part of Marin Marais's second book (also engraved by Du Plessy) was published earlier in April 1711. Yet we still know almost nothing about

this mysterious figure, who was nevertheless one of the most brilliant engravers of his time,¹³ and fully up to the challenge presented by the engraving of Couperin's *Pièces de clavecin*.

The excellent result, as Couperin emphasized in his preface to Book 1, was costly to achieve: 'I have spared neither expense nor effort, as will be evident from the attentiveness, intelligence and precision of the engraving'.¹⁴ Not only is this engraving clear and precise, but the placement on the page is extremely careful. As some of the pieces are particularly long—'Les Sylvains' (1^{er} ordre), 'Les Agréments' (5^e ordre) and 'Les Charms' (9^e ordre), for example—Couperin decided to abandon the oblong quarto format traditionally used for harpsichord publications and well suited to the allemandes and other dances typical of such collections. Instead, his first and subsequent books were engraved in an upright folio format, approximately 37cm high and 27cm wide before binding, similar to the full scores of Lully's operas. This highly original choice not only suited the dimensions of some of Couperin's new pieces, but also had symbolic value as to the place he hoped his work would occupy in the musical pantheon—on a par with Lully, to whom Couperin was to render homage in his *Apothéose* of 1725. With the exception of Rameau, whose three books of harpsichord pieces of 1706, 1724 and 1729–30 retained the older oblong quarto format, most French harpsichordist-composers henceforth adopted the larger page-size of Couperin's *Pièces de clavecin* and thus subscribed to the new aesthetic model.

Couperin was an innovator not only in the style of his compositions and the way they were presented in print but also in the deployment of musical notation, and he provided his interpreters with extremely precise indications of how to perform his music. Moreover, his rhythmic notation differed from that of all his contemporaries. In 'La Terpsicore' (2^e ordre, bars 5 and 7) and the 'Sarabande l'Unique' (8^e ordre, bars 2 and 19), for instance, he notated groups of demisemiquavers with five rather than three beams, and even used six beams in 'La Raphaële' (8^e ordre, bar 31) and the 'Second Prélude' (bar 16) of *L'art de toucher le clavecin*. He distinguished typographically between ties and slurs, the latter having squared-off ends (see, for example, [illus.4\(a\)](#) and [illus.4\(b\)](#))

below), and asked the engraver to use two sizes of trill sign: a larger symbol for longer notes and a smaller one for notes of a quaver or less.¹⁵ As for repeats and related signs, which are often quite complex in his *rondeaux*, Couperin conceived these with extraordinary care, developing a range of elegant symbols for their execution, apparently in consultation with the engraver himself. Finally, he ensured that the title and introductory pages of Books 1 and 2 were particularly ornate. These were engraved by Claude-Auguste Bery (1651–1732), who, as befits the author of *L'Écriture italienne bâtarde en sa perfection* (self-published in 1699 or 1700), engraved Couperin's elegantly designed dedication and preface in the Italian style.¹⁶

While the cost of producing Books 1 and 2 must surely have been high, we cannot calculate the precise amounts required for the engraving of the music and preliminary pages, in view of the extraordinary character of these publications. From Elisabeth Fau's research on the engraving process cited above, we can estimate that each plate for Couperin's books cost approximately 7 or 8 *livres* (pounds). According to Davitt Moroney, the cost per word of engraving the preliminary pages was one *sou* (shilling: one 20th of a *livre*).¹⁷ Thus the total cost of engraving the first book would have been between 554 and 626 *livres*. To this we must add the costs of printing and paper and of obtaining the *privilège* to print for a 20-year period, none of which is precisely known.¹⁸ However, unlike music editions set in moveable type, which typically had print runs ranging from 500 to 1,200 copies, engraved editions were printed in smaller quantities, which allowed corrections to be made and avoided excessive storage. In the case of Couperin's first two books, the unusually large number of copies of the first print run preserved in public collections (14 of the first book and 7 of the second),¹⁹ suggests a total of between 50 and 100 copies. Undoubtedly the cost of engraving and printing each book would have far exceeded the 600 *livres* that Couperin earned annually as organist at the Chapelle Royale, although this was not his only source of income.

Such expenses explain why the composer needed the support of a private benefactor. Couperin

dedicated Book 1 to Christophe-Alexandre Pajot de Villers (?–1739), who, with his brother, Louis-Léon Pajot d'Onsembray,²⁰ held the important post of controller-general of postal communications and way stations. Pajot de Villers's fortune at the time of his marriage in 1713 has been estimated at about 500,000 *livres*.²¹ The second book was dedicated to François Prat (1669–1742), one of the principal tax collectors of Paris from 1708 to 1742, whose fortune was estimated at 1,201,547 *livres* in 1716, the time when Couperin was preparing this book for publication.²² Strangely enough, although 'La Villers' (Book 1, 5^e *ordre*) was named in honour of Couperin's first patron, none of the pieces in Book 2 alludes to François Prat or his wife, unless we take 'Les Charmes' (9^e *ordre*) to be an indirect allusion to Madame. By the time he came to Book 3, Couperin must have achieved some financial stability, because he evidently no longer needed the support of a dedicatee. Indeed, with the exception of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* of 1716–17, dedicated to Louis XV, none of Couperin's subsequent publications includes a dedication to an important personage.

The posthumous inventory of Couperin's estate shows that he maintained control of the production of his printed editions.²³ The inventory itemizes some 496 plates of copper 'upon which are engraved the works of the said deceased sieur Couperin'. This figure corresponds to the works published before 1725—the first three harpsichord books, the *Concerts royaux*, the *Leçons de ténèbres*, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, *Les goûts-réunis* and *L'Apothéose de Lully*. To these we must add 117 tin plates 'upon which are engraved similar works',²⁴ a figure that corresponds to the number required for *Les Nations*. Curiously, however, the inventory does not itemize any plates for the *Pièces de violes* or Book 4—approximately 150 of them, probably of tin. Be that as it may, such plates occupied much storage space in Couperin's apartment. The realization of a new impression, particularly of the music plates, was an operation necessitating a good deal of shifting things around: transporting the heavy plates and delivering the printed results to Couperin and his distributors. Unfortunately, we do not know what kind of printing press was used or where the preliminary pages and music were printed.²⁵

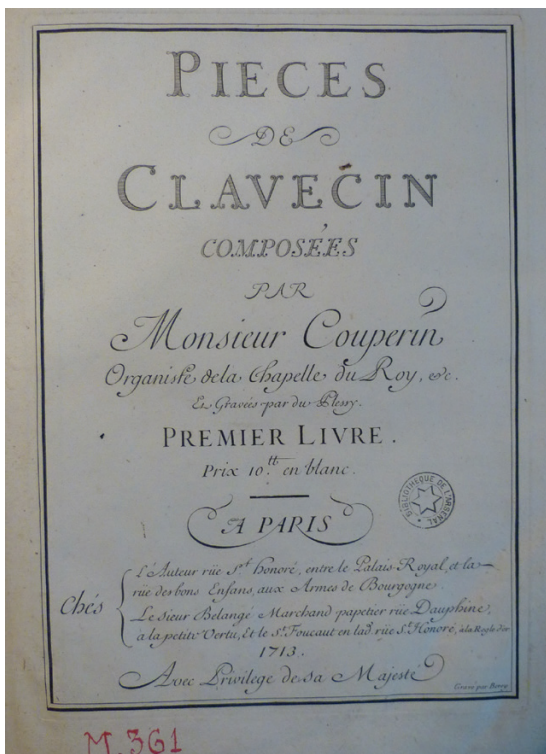
Comparing the different impressions

The first book was published at some point between June 1713, the date of Couperin's *privilège*, and September 1713, when the *dépôt légal* was established and the book was deposited at the *chambre syndicale de la librairie* by Bellangé, one of the booksellers who disseminated this publication. Book 2 appeared at some point between April and May 1717 and was deposited at the *chambre syndicale* in July by the music bookseller Foucault.²⁶ In each case, these first impressions are identifiable by several elements:

Book 1 (see [illus.1](#)): the price, 10 *lt* [*livres tournois*] and address printed on the title-page:

L'Auteur rüe S'. honoré, entre le Palais-Royal, et la | rüe des bons Enfans, aux Armes de Bourgogne. | Le sieur Belangé Marchand papetier rüe Dauphine, | à la petite Vertu, Et le S'. Foucaut en lad. rüe S'. Honoré, à la Regle d'or

Two blank pages among the preliminary sheets: the verso of the title-page, p.[iii]; and the verso of the second page of the preface, p.[vi].

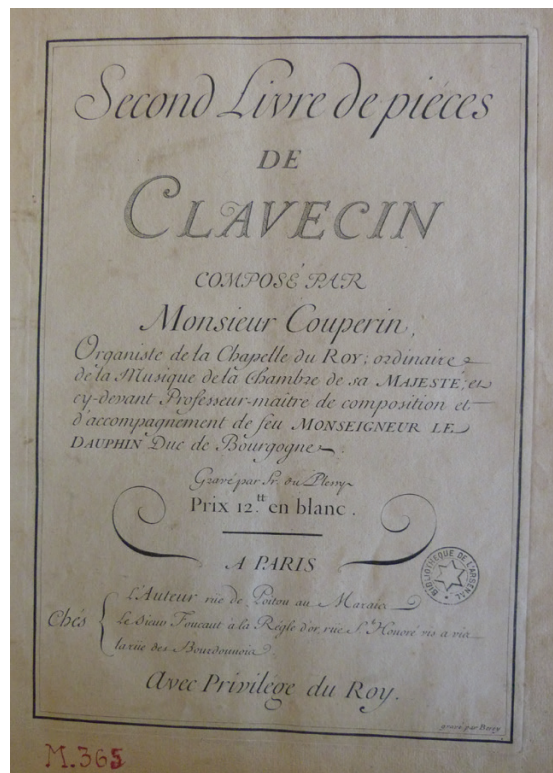


1 Couperin, title-page of Book 1 (1713¹) (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, m. 361)

Book 2 (see [illus.2](#)): the price, 12 *lt*, and address printed on the title-page:

L'Auteur rüe de Poitou au Marais | Le Sieur Foucaut à la Régle d'or, rüe S'. Honoré vis a vis | la rüe des Bourdonnois
Three blank pages among the preliminary sheets: the verso of the title-page, p.[iii]; the verso of the dedicatory page, p.[iv]; and the verso of the page with the preface, p.[vi].

While the music of subsequent impressions, as we shall see, contains various additions and corrections, the title-pages and preliminary pages were subjected to far more alteration, regarding the sale price and the addresses at which the scores could be purchased. Moreover, the blank pages among the preliminary sheets would later allow Couperin to inform potential purchasers of the publication of his more recent works. A close comparison of these apparently insignificant parameters reveals that the 16 surviving impressions of Book 1 were printed between 1713 and 1745 (see [Appendix 1](#) online), while



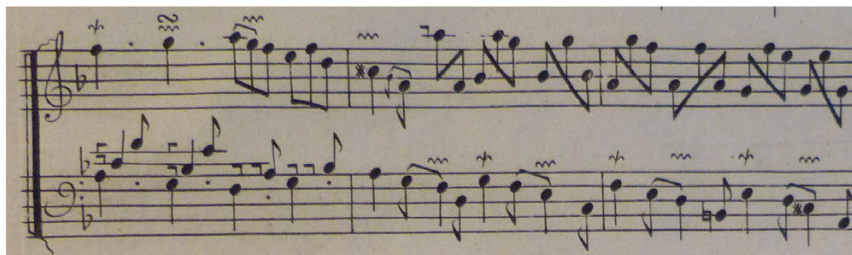
2 Couperin, title-page of Book 2 (1717¹) (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, m. 365)

the 15 of Book 2 appeared between 1717 and 1745 (Appendix 2 online). This article hereafter denotes each impression with the year of the first impression followed by a superscript number.

The least difficult elements to analyse are the additions and corrections to the music. The musical plates of Book 1 were modified on only two occasions, in 1717, when the third and fourth impressions (1713³ and 1713⁴) were printed. Shortly after publication of the second edition of *L'art de toucher le clavecin*,²⁷ probably between March and July 1717, Couperin added to the third impression (1713³) of Book 1 seven cross-references (on pp.6, 9, 32 and 72) to passages of fingering printed in this treatise:²⁸ in 'La Milordine' (1^{er} ordre, p.6), for example, he wrote 'See my *méthode*, page

46, for an indication of how to finger this passage' (see *illus.3*). In the preface to the first book Couperin explained he had intended to indicate the fingering for certain passages, but changed his mind because 'this would have injected confusion into the engraving'.²⁹

Shortly thereafter, Couperin proceeded to a second series of corrections in the fourth impression of Book 1 (1713⁴). I have found some 17 of these, five of them in 'Les Idées heureuses' (2^e ordre).³⁰ Such an unusually large number suggests a certain haste in the printing process. In bar 20, for example (see *illus.4*), the right-hand *f#* on the second beat, incorrectly notated as a semiquaver in the first three impressions, is now corrected to a demi-semiquaver, written idiosyncratically with four flags



3 Couperin, 'La Milordine', p.6, bars 4–6: (a) 1713¹ (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, M. 361); (b) 1713³ (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Vma. 2590)



4 Couperin, 'Les Idées heureuses', p.33, bar 20: (a) 1713¹ (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, M. 361); 1713⁴ (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Rés. F. 76)

(hooks), underlining Couperin's desire that this note be extremely short. On beat 4 of the same bar, this fourth impression (1713⁴) now includes a crotchet rest, as does bar 23 on beat 1. Finally, in bars 23 (right hand, beat 2) and 27 (right hand, beat 1), a *d'* has been corrected from a quaver to a dotted quaver. Curiously, however, Couperin did not emend three obviously wrong notes: in the 'Seconde courante' (1^{er} ordre, bar 9), for example, the left-hand crotchet *a* should be *b*.³¹ Elsewhere, Couperin adds acute accents on the letter E (in 'La Ténébreuse', for instance) and on the letter A when this is a preposition; he also adds circumflexes where necessary on the letters U and E, in the preliminary pages and in the titles of the individual pieces, both in the score and in the table of contents (pp.76–8).³² This second phase of musical and textual correction was probably carried out after July 1717, shortly after the publication of Book 2. Thereafter, the musical plates of Book 1 were never retouched or re-engraved, even when some of the plates had become worn.³³

The changes made to Book 2 are slightly more complex than those to Book 1. Here the plates were corrected not twice but three times, for the second, third and fourth impressions (1717², 1717³, 1717⁴). Shortly after publication, Couperin introduced into the second impression a first 'wave' of nine corrections, which appear only in a single surviving exemplar.³⁴ In 'La Raphaéle' (8^e ordre), for example, in the right hand at bar 22 (see *illus.5*) and left at bar 31, there are corrections to the rhythm, whose notation throughout this piece is highly complex. In the third impression (1717³), of which two exemplars survive, there are 25 further revisions, notably in 'La Castelane' (11^e ordre), where Couperin added eight

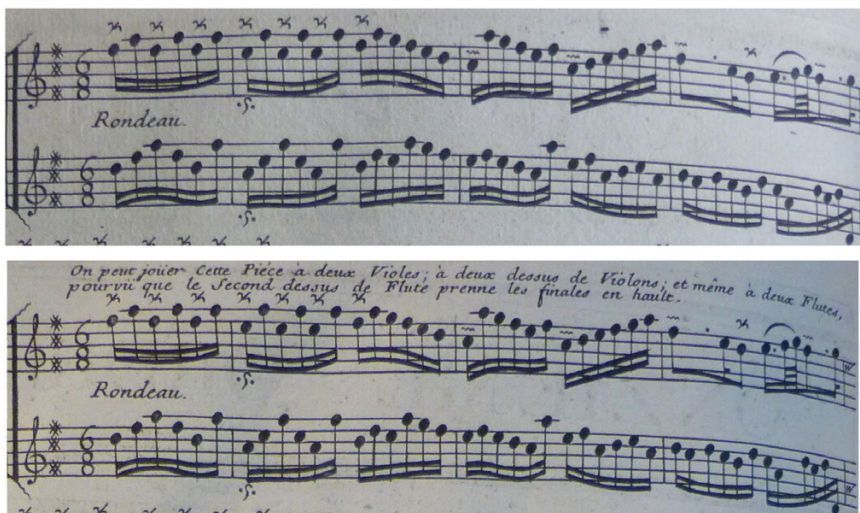
suspension symbols, which he had invented to indicate that in slow, gentle pieces the lowest and highest voices should not be played together: 'the silence that precedes the note on which this sign is placed must be adjusted in accordance with the taste of the interpreter'.³⁵

Finally, for the fourth impression of Book 2 (1717⁴) Couperin made three corrections, two of them in 'La Bersan' (6^e ordre), in the right hand at bars 3 and 13, and one in 'Les barricades mystérieuses' (6^e ordre) in the right hand at bar 27.³⁶ To these we should add, in the third and fourth impressions (1717^{3–4}), several textual corrections similar to those Couperin made in Book 1, both in the preliminary pages and the titles of the pieces.³⁷ At the beginning of 'Les Bagatelles' (10^e ordre), for instance, he inserted a brief note to stipulate that 'This piece may be played by two viols, two violins and even two flutes, provided that the second flute plays the notes at the ends of sections an octave higher than written' (see *illus.6*). As in Book 1, certain wrong notes—rare in this publication—remain uncorrected. In 'L'Atalante' (12^e ordre), for example, the *F*# at bar 28 (left hand, beat 1) should be a *D*.³⁸ This omission may be explained by the difficulty of manipulating the brass plates on which the score was engraved. Most of the modifications in Books 1 and 2 occur in the form of additions or, less frequently, deletions, which would have been easier to accomplish than changes of notes.³⁹

The greatest number of changes occur in the preliminary matter of the various impressions, and especially on the title-page. The latter was the object of numerous successive changes, but only as concerns the indications of price and address. The frame conceived by Bery remains otherwise unaltered,



5 Couperin, 'La Raphaéle', p.23, bars 21–2: (a) 1717¹ (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, M. 365); (b) 1717² (Bologna, Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, EE.149)

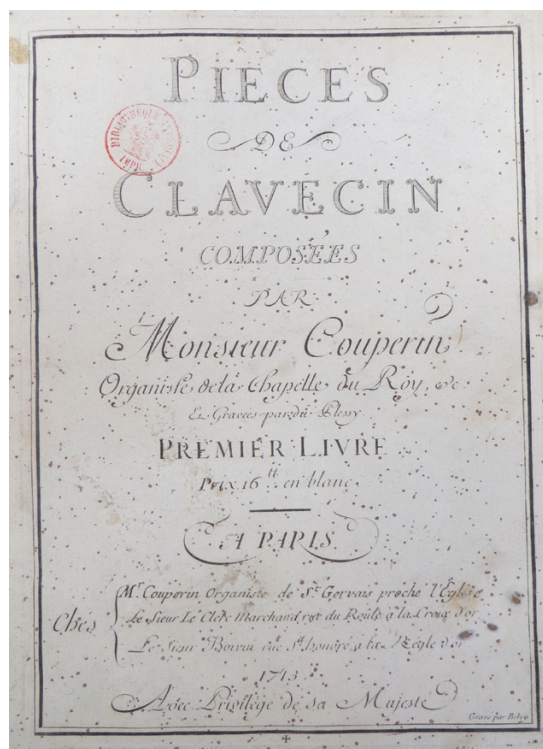


6 Couperin, 'Les Bagatelles', p.62: (a) 1717¹ (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, m. 365); (b) 1717³ (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, m. 362 [2])

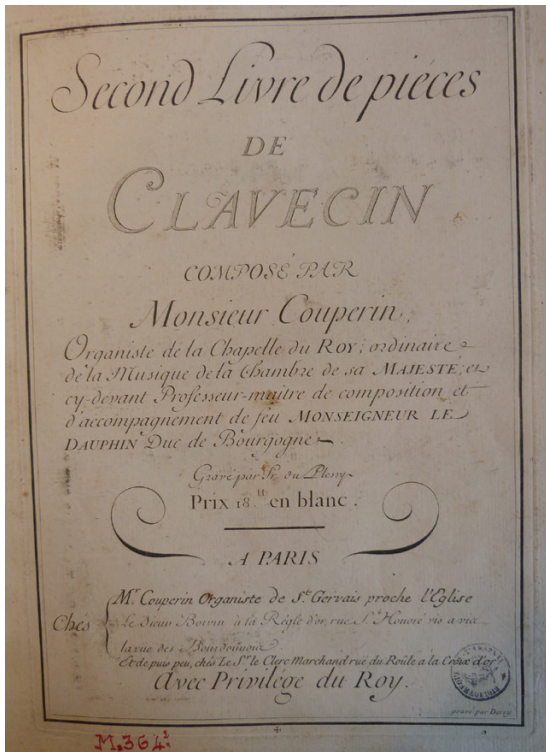
as may be seen by comparing the title-page of the first impression (1713¹) of Book 1 (illus.1, above) with that of the final impression (1713¹⁶), issued in 1745 (illus.7), and the title-page of the first impression (1717¹) of Book 2 (illus.2, above) with the 15th impression (1717¹⁵), issued in 1745 (illus.8).

Fluctuating sales prices

When Book 1 was first put on sale, its price was 10 *livres* unbound (*en blanc*) and, according to an indication on one surviving exemplar, 12 *livres*, 10 *sous* when bound.⁴⁰ On other copies, this price has been corrected by hand to 16 *livres* or changed on the plate itself to 18 *livres* (as in the sixth and seventh impressions, 1713⁶⁻⁷). After the eighth impression, of 1724 (1713⁸), the price was lowered to 16 *livres*, and from then on remained stable. We observe the same phenomenon in Book 2. Originally sold unbound for 12 *livres*, its price was frequently corrected by hand to 18 *livres*, as indicated on several extant copies of the first impression. It was then raised to 20 *livres* on impressions five to seven (1717⁵⁻⁷) in the 1720s. The price finally stabilized at 18 *livres* after the eighth impression (1717⁸) of 1724. These variations in the price of both books may be



7 Couperin, title-page of Book 1 (1713¹⁶) (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Vm⁷ 1864)



8 Couperin, title-page of Book 2 (1717¹⁵) (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, M. 364 [2])

explained partly by the monetary crisis of the 1720s but also, perhaps, because the initial price was simply found to be too low.

According to one of Foucault's catalogues dated 1707,⁴¹ the harpsichord pieces of d'Anglebert and Le Roux, in slimmer volumes than Couperin's, were on sale for 12 *livres*. Furthermore, Marin Marais's Books 3 and 4, published in the same years as Couperin's first two books, were priced at 12 *livres* for the viol part and 6 *livres* for the continuo part, both in oblong format.⁴² Thus, considering the format and the quality of the engraving, the price of Couperin's books seems eminently reasonable for the period, even with the alterations we have noted, and this could explain their widespread distribution.⁴³

Couperin's addresses and other points of sale

Changes of address on the title-pages of successive impressions allow us to follow the composer's

peregrinations. From 1700, he lived on the rue Saint-François, in the Marais du Temple district (see *a* in [illus.9](#)).⁴⁴ At some unspecified date, probably late 1711 or early 1712, he moved to the rue Saint-Honoré, 'one of the longest and most beautiful streets of the entire city';⁴⁵ here he resided at the Armes de Bourgogne, between the Palais-Royal and the rue des Bons-Enfants, an address that appears uniquely on the first impression of Book 1 (1713¹) and on the title-page of the *Leçons de ténèbres*, the latter officially deposited in March 1714 by its publisher, Foucault (see *b* in [illus.9](#)). Before March 1717, when he moved to the rue de Poitou in the Marais district (see *d* in [illus.9](#)), Couperin resided briefly at the corner of the rue des Foureurs, opposite Les Carneaux, as indicated on the title-page of the first edition of *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, officially deposited at the *syndicat de la librairie* in June 1716 (see *c* in [illus.9](#)).⁴⁶ It may be that Couperin's personal life was unstable in that year, because on one exemplar of the second impression of Book 1 (1713²) dating from 1716 (and bearing the *ex-libris* of Jean Salis de Zizers, captain in Louis XIV's Swiss Guard from 1684 to 1721),⁴⁷ no address appears after the mention of 'l'Auteur' (see [illus.10](#)). This exemplar was doubtless purchased when the composer was in the process of moving house.

In 1723 Couperin moved from the rue de Poitou to the rue Neuve-des-Bons-Enfants, 'opposite the stables of the Hôtel de Toulouse',⁴⁸ where he would remain for the rest of his life (see *e* in [illus.9](#)). After his death in September 1733, his cousin, Nicolas Couperin (1680–1748), who had taken over his organist post at Saint-Gervais in 1723, continued to oversee the sales of Couperin's music (in cooperation with the composer's widow, Marie Anne Ansault) until his own death in 1748. The same cousin, with Jean Landrin, organist at the Chapelle Royale, arranged for the evaluation of Couperin's music for the posthumous inventory in September 1733. After this date, the cousin's name, 'M. Couperin, organist at Saint-Gervais', appears at the bottom of the title-page of the final impressions of Books 1 and 2 (1713^{14–16} and 1717^{14–15}).

While interested parties could obtain copies of Couperin's works from his home address, they could also purchase the first book at the shops of Bellangé or Foucault. Bellangé, a stationer who lived in the



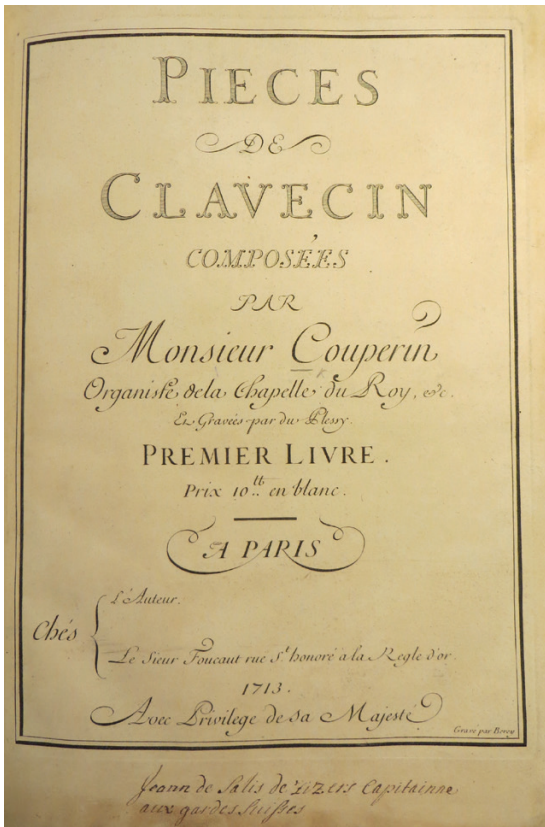
9 Couperin's addresses marked on the *Plan de Paris dédié à Messieurs les Prévôt des marchands et échevins de la ville par M. l'abbé Delagrive* (Paris, 1728): (a) Rue Saint-François; (b) Rue Saint-Honoré, aux Armes de Bourgogne; (c) Rue des Foureurs en face les Carneaux; (d) Rue de Poitou; (e) Rue Neuve-des-Bons-Enfants vis-à-vis les Écuries de L'Hôtel de Toulouse; (f) Église Saint-Gervais.

rue Dauphine, occasionally sold musical compositions, notably Alexandre Pasquier's first *Livre d'airs sérieux, tendres et à boire* (1715), likewise engraved by Du Plessy, and Robert de Visée's *Pièces de théorbe et de luth* (1716). Bellangé's name disappeared from the title-page after the second impression (1716) of the first book (1713²). It was especially Foucault, whose business, *À la règle d'or*, was located in the rue Saint-Honoré, who assured the sales of this volume until his death at the end of 1719, after which the business was taken over by his widow and then by his successor, François Boivin and his wife from July 1721 until the 1750s. Couperin's posthumous inventory mentions that, as of 10 February 1733, Boivin owed the composer 90 *livres* for the sales of his works.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, we have no information about these sales. After April 1728, we find the name of Le Clerc, whose business, *À la Croix d'or*, in the

rue du Roule, became a point of sale for Couperin's works until the 1750s. In such ways, the title-pages of Books 1 and 2 reflect with remarkable precision the fluctuations in their commercial success, which can be followed more or less year by year.

Couperin's notices to the public

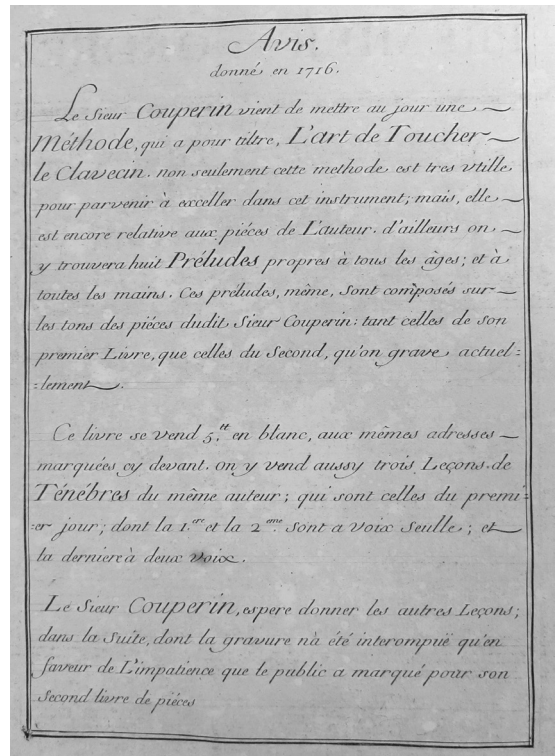
While the preface to Book 1 remained essentially unchanged after the third impression (1713³) of 1717 (apart from the addition of acute accents to such words as *pièces*), that to Book 2 saw the insertion of a notice at the bottom of the preface to the third impression (1717³), issued towards the end of 1717 or the beginning of 1718. Here, Couperin announced that he would replace the first edition of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (1716) with the revised second edition, recently published:⁵⁰



10 Couperin, title-page of Book 1 (1713²) (London, British Library, i.7)

Those who purchased the *Méthode* in question, in 1716, may return it to me, provided that it has not been bound or damaged, and I shall provide them free of charge with an exemplar of the 1717 impression, which contains a supplement relative to the second book of *Pièces de clavecin*.⁵¹

The new supplement was not the only reason that Couperin offered the exchange. As Davitt Moroney has shown, the 1716 edition of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* contained numerous orthographical errors that must have mortified Couperin considering that the book was dedicated to the king. Nonetheless, the most important changes in Books 1 and 2 occur on page [vi], which had remained blank at the time of the first impression. After the second impression of Book 1 (1713²) in 1716, Couperin added in this space an 'Avis. donné en 1716' ('notice issued in 1716'), concerning *L'art de toucher le clavecin* and the *Leçons de ténèbres* (see [illus.11](#)). He would continue to update this 'Avis' after the third impression of both books, changing



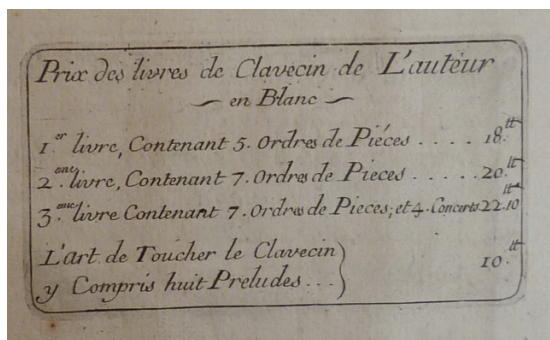
11 Couperin, 'Avis. donné en 1716' (1713³), p.[vi] (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Vma. 2590)

the date ('Avis. donné en 1717'), adding a paragraph to the text and revising the sales price.

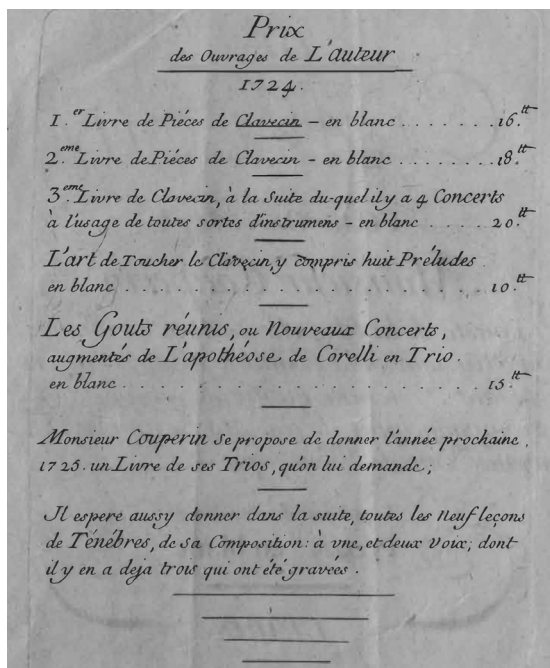
In the 1716 impression of Book 1 (1713²), Couperin announced that the eight preludes of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* were 'composed in the keys ... of the first book and those of the second, which is currently being engraved'.⁵² But in the 1717 impression (1713³) he modified this wording to 'which has just been published'.⁵³ He then added a sentence, in small letters, almost identical with that in Book 2 indicating that he would exchange the first edition of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* for the second.⁵⁴ Finally, in the same 'Avis', Couperin altered the price of *L'art de toucher* from 5 to 6 livres for the fifth impression of Book 1 and the fourth impression of Book 2 (1713⁵ and 1717⁴)⁵⁵ in or around 1718.

After the publication of Book 3 in October 1722, this 'Avis' disappeared and was replaced, still on page [vi], by a short list giving the prices of Couperin's first three books of harpsichord works and that of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (see [illus.12](#)). This was the period

when the prices were at their highest.⁵⁶ Finally, in 1724, Couperin had a new list engraved, 'Prix des ouvrages de l'auteur 1724' (see [illus.13](#)), this being more complete than the previous one, since it listed not only *Les goûts-réunis* but also the forthcoming publication of *Les Nations*, 'a book of trios'. Rather than appearing on page [vi], where we still find the short list just mentioned, the 1724 catalogue appeared for the first time on the verso of the title-page, i.e. page [ii]. This was



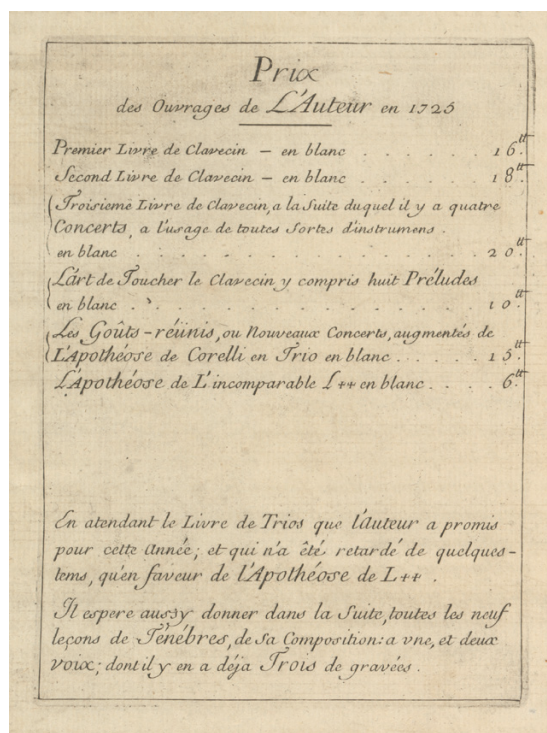
12 Couperin, 'Prix des livres de Clavecin de L'auteur' (1713⁷ and 1717⁷), p.[vi] (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, m. 363)



13 Couperin, 'Prix des ouvrages de l'auteur 1724' (1713⁸ and 1717⁸⁻⁹), p.[ii] (Melbourne, State Library of Victoria, LHD28)

the only time Couperin placed it there, presumably to publicize his latest publications and his new address on the rue Neuve-des-Bons-Enfants. He thus rushed to have this two-sided page printed so that it would appear in the eighth impression of Book 1 (1713⁸) and the eighth and ninth of Book 2 (1717⁸⁻⁹). Furthermore, these impressions demonstrate that Couperin still possessed the preliminary pages including the short list publicizing his three harpsichord books—something which could have caused confusion, since the 1724 catalogue included the newly lowered prices of these books, while the short list indicated the higher prices.

The catalogue on the verso of the title-page also demonstrates that, instead of sending announcements of his new works to the *Nouveau Mercure* like Marin Marais, Couperin preferred to update the preliminary matter on a regular basis to draw attention to his new publications.⁵⁷ Perhaps he thought the cost of newspaper announcements was too high, and instead preferred to publicize his work essentially by word of mouth.



14 Couperin, 'Prix des Ouvrages de L'auteur en 1725' (1713⁹ and 1717¹⁰), p.[vi] (Geneva, Bibliothèque, Ib 1420)

To end the confusion caused by the coexistence of two catalogues with different prices, Couperin had a new list, dated 1725, engraved on page [vi], to which he added his latest publication, 'L'Apothéose de L'incomparable L++ [Lully] en blanc: 6lt' (see [illus.14](#)), leaving definitively the verso of the title-page once again blank. All subsequent impressions carry this new list.

Subsequently the catalogue was updated until 1730 as follows, although strangely Couperin never bothered to change the date of 1725:

The Trios [*Les Nations*] in 4 separate part books, one for 1st violin, another for 2nd violin, another for cello, another for figured bass. The 4 part books: 10lt [*Dépôt légal*, 24 December 1726].⁵⁸

Pièces de viole [*sic*], with figured bass: 6lt [*Dépôt légal*, 27 July 1728].⁵⁹

Fourth book for harpsichord: 15lt [*Dépôt légal*, 23 August 1730].⁶⁰

Conclusion

The totality of these changes, which concern both the preliminary pages and the engraved music, demonstrates the value of every surviving copy as a piece of crucial evidence concerning the works' distribution and commercial success. These parameters demonstrate that such copies form a complex assemblage of regularly up-dated preliminary pages (prices, addresses, catalogues) and musical scores (see [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#) online). It is indeed quite likely that in future years we will discover further impressions of Books 1 and 2, thereby increasing the number of possible permutations within these parameters.

A close study of the many impressions of these two publications reveals some hitherto unknown aspects of Couperin's personality and career, not least his many changes of domicile between 1715 and 1723. It also opens a new perspective on his extraordinary imagination, something which has been long

evident from his compositions. By inventing a new format for the publication of his *pièces de clavecin* and having them engraved with rare finesse and in such a way as to avoid page-turns wherever possible, Couperin revealed a desire to perfect his *œuvre* and bequeath it posterity. It was surely with genuine financial sacrifice that he entered upon the adventure of publishing his own music. Also, the fluctuation of the prices, the way in which he sought to publicize his latest compositions, and the efforts he made to find financial backers in the case of Books 1 and 2, are indicative of the economic risks involved in such an enterprise. In the preface to the fourth book, Couperin wrote, with a degree of nostalgia tinted with bitterness, that he 'hopes that his family will find in his various portfolios items that will cause them to regret his passing'.⁶¹ The posthumous inventory reveals that, at the time of his death, these *portefeuilles* ('[cartons] folded in two and covered with leather or some other fabric, serving to carry sheets of paper')⁶² were relatively full. In his domicile were 33 unbound exemplars of Book 1, ten of Book 2, thirteen of Book 3, eleven of Book 4, seven of *Les goûts-réunis*, eleven of the *Pièces de violes*, five of *L'Apothéose de Lully*, two of *Les Nations* and twelve of *L'art de toucher le clavecin*.⁶³

The composer's cousin Nicolas, not content merely to continue putting these volumes on sale, rescued the brass and tin plates and, in cooperation with Couperin's widow, continued to republish the composer's works until his own death in 1748. Out of a total of 124 exemplars of Books 1 and 2, more than a third (46 exemplars) bear Nicolas Couperin's address. The large number of surviving copies of these two books is not only evidence of the commercial success they enjoyed; it also suggests that Couperin fully deserved (as he put it in the final sentence of the preface to Book 4) that 'chimerical immortality to which almost all men aspire', which in his case was not in the least 'chimérique'.⁶⁴

Translated by Peter Bloom and Graham Sadler

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¹ ‘Professeur-maître de composition et d’accompagnement de feu Monseigneur le Dauphin Duc de Bourgogne’; on the title-pages of Books 2 and 3 and *Les goûts-réunis*, though not of Book 1.

² François Couperin, *Pieces de clavecin ... Premier Livre* (Paris, 1713), Préface, p.[v]: ‘six Princes ou Princesses de la Maison Royale’.

³ D. Fuller, ‘François Couperin révolutionnaire: les pièces de clavecin’, in *François Couperin (1668–1733)*, ed. C. Cessac (Versailles, 2000), pp.47–74, at pp.47–8.

⁴ These are described in François Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre (1713)*, ed. D. Herlin (Kassel, 2016), p.109, and François Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Second livre (1717)*, ed. D. Herlin (Kassel, 2018), p.114. Since the former appeared, three further exemplars have been found, bringing the known number to 72. Of Book 3, some 35 copies survive in public collections. The number of extant copies of Book 4 is smaller, although I have not been able to establish the exact figure, as the descriptions in RISM are often incomplete.

⁵ For full details, see S. Bouissou and D. Herlin, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Catalogue thématique des œuvres musicales*, i, *Musique instrumentale, Musique vocale religieuse et profane* (Paris, 2007), pp.64–70, 80–5.

⁶ Brook Taylor, *Contemplatio Philosophica: a Posthumous Work ... to which is prefixed a Life of the Author, by His Grandson, Sir William Young ... with an Appendix containing Sundry original Papers, Letters from the Count Raymond de Montmort ...* (London, 1793), pp.101–2: ‘J’y joins un volume qui vient de paroître de pieces de Clavecin très estimées en ce pays. Il sera à l’usage de Mademoiselles

vos filles qui en jouent très bien à ce que j’ay appris ... J’aurois envoyé relié le recueil de Couperon [sic] mais Mr. Lully [sic for Loeillet] qui s’en charge ne l’auroit pas porté si commodement’. I warmly thank Bruce Gustafson for bringing this letter to my attention, and Andrew Woolley for drawing my attention to this work.

⁷ See R. Rasch, *The music publishing house of Estienne Roger and Michel-Charles Le Cène (1696–1743)*, Part Four: Catalogue, entries for D’Anglebert and Le Roux, consulted online at: <https://roger.sites.uu.nl/>.

⁸ See Bouissou and Herlin, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Catalogue thématique*, i, pp.70, 84, and W. C. Smith and C. Humphries, *A bibliography of the musical works published by the firm of John Walsh* (London, 1968), pp.131, 283–4.

⁹ See G. Sadler, ‘Rameau’s contacts with Britain’, in *Musical exchange between Britain and Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. J. Cunningham and B. White (Woodbridge, 2020), pp.450–66.

¹⁰ See also K. Gilbert, ‘Les livres de François Couperin. Note bibliographique’, *Revue de musicologie*, lvi/ii/2 (1972), pp.256–61, at pp.258–9.

¹¹ The engravers were Gillet and Henry Bonneuil. See D. Herlin, ‘Introduction’, in Jean Henry d’Anglebert, *Pièces de clavecin* (Geneva, 2001), p.xxi.

¹² Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre (1713)*, ed. Herlin, pp.xx–xxi.

¹³ See E. Fau, ‘La gravure de musique à Paris des origines à la Révolution (1660–1789)’ (Paris: doctoral thesis, École nationale des Chartes, 1977–8), pp.263–8.

¹⁴ Couperin, *Pieces de clavecin ... Premier Livre*, Préface, pp.[iv]–[v]:

‘Je n’y ay épargné ny la dépence, ny mes peines; et l’on ne devra qu’à cette extrême attention, l’intelligence et la précision qu’on remarquera dans la gravure’.

¹⁵ Discussed in K. Gilbert, ‘Des barricades toujours mystérieuses’, in *François Couperin: nouveaux regards*, ed. H. Dreyfus (Paris, 1998), pp.65–80, at p.67.

¹⁶ Marin Marais (in his Book 4, 1717) followed Couperin’s lead in getting Berey to engrave the title-page of the continuo part.

¹⁷ See D. Moroney, booklet accompanying his recording of the first book of Couperin’s *Pièces de clavecin* (Plectra 21201, 2012), p.16.

¹⁸ The only data on printing costs concern the moveable type editions of Christophe Ballard as recently analysed by Laurent Guillo, to whom I am very grateful (see L. Guillo, *Christophe Ballard, music printer-librarian under Louis XIV* (Turnhout, forthcoming)). He mentions that typographically printed sheets cost less than engraved ones, which were slower to produce because of the need to clean each plate before pressing. On the cost of sheet music, see also R. Rasch, ‘Wieviel kostete Musik im 18. Jahrhundert?’, in *Das Leipziger Musikverlagswesen, Innerstädtische Netzwerke und international Ausstrahlung*, ed. S. Keym and P. Schmitz (Hildesheim, 2016), pp.61–83, at pp.61–9.

¹⁹ By comparison, there is only one extant exemplar of Louis Marchand’s first suite (1699) and two of Leroux’s *Pièces de clavecin* (1705); see B. Gustafson and D. Fuller, *A catalogue of French harpsichord music 1699–1780* (Oxford, 1990), pp.166, 172.

²⁰ The dedicatee of André Campra’s third book of *Cantates françaises* (Paris, 1728).

²¹ T. Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 2011), pp.1790–1.

²² Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers*, p.1995.

²³ M. Antoine, 'Autour de François Couperin', *Revue de musicologie*, xxxiv/2 (1952), pp.109–27.

²⁴ Antoine, 'Autour de François Couperin', p.124: 'Quatre cent quatre-vingt seize planches de cuivre rouge, sur lesquelles sont gravées les œuvres dudit défunt sieur Couperin cy-dessus mentionnées. 1.240 livres. / Cent dix-sept autres planches d'étin, sur lesquelles sont pareillement gravées les œuvres dudit défunt sieur Couperin. 175 livres 10 sols.' This inventory also itemizes 27 copper plates on which the engraving has been erased ('Vingt-sept planches de cuivre ... dont la gravure est effacée. 24 livres 6 sols').

²⁵ The crediting of a printer seems to have begun around 1730, notably in the first edition of *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), where the words 'Imprimé par Montulé' (probably François Montulay) appear at the bottom of the title-page.

²⁶ Information on the legal deposit was provided by Marguerite Sablonnière, to whom I offer my sincere thanks.

²⁷ Of the two editions of *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, the first (1716) does not contain passages of fingering from Book 2, since that book had not yet been printed. The 1717 edition, with an entirely revised text, includes these fingered passages from Book 2. See D. Moroney, 'Couperin et les Contradicteurs. La révision de *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*', in *François Couperin: nouveaux regards*, pp.163–86.

²⁸ In one exemplar of the first impression (1713¹) in the Statens Musikbibliotek, Stockholm, the references to *L'art de toucher* have been added by hand, no doubt by Couperin himself. See 'Critical commentary', *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre (1713)*, ed. Herlin, p.109.

²⁹ Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin ... Premier Livre*, Préface, p.[v]: 'J'avois dessein de marquer par des chiffres, les doigts dont il faudroit se servir, du moins à de certains endroits qui ne sont pas indifferents; mais cela auroit jetté de la confusion dans la gravure.'

³⁰ See 'Special comments', in *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre (1713)*, ed. Herlin, pp.124–5, and facsimiles 4a–b, p.46, showing several of these corrections.

³¹ The other wrong notes are found in the 'Première courante' (3^e ordre, bar 12, second note, left hand): an *a* rather than a *g*; and in the third part of 'Les Baccanales' (4^e ordre, bar 90, second note, left hand): a *B^b* rather than a *C*.

³² See 'Critical commentary', *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre (1713)*, ed. Herlin, p.112.

³³ Compare Rameau's *Pièces de clavessin*, where 20 of the 33 pages were re-engraved at the time of the sixth edition, or his *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin*, where 19 of the 29 pages were re-engraved for the third edition. See Bouissou and Herlin, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Catalogue thématique*, i, pp.66, 69, 82–3.

³⁴ Unfortunately, this copy (Bologna, Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, EE.149, bound with Book 1) does not include the six preliminary pages of Book 2.

³⁵ Couperin, *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (1717), p.18: 'Le silence qui précède la note sur laquelle elle est marquée doit être réglé par le goût de la personne qui exécute.'

³⁶ See 'Special comments', *Pièces de clavecin. Deuxième livre (1717)*, ed. Herlin, p.126.

³⁷ See 'Critical commentary', *Pièces de clavecin. Deuxième livre (1717)*, ed. Herlin, pp.116–17.

³⁸ This passage appeared in *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (1717 edition, p.71) with the corrected note *D*. For discussion of further errors uncorrected by Couperin, see the critical commentaries to Books 1 and 2 recently issued by Bärenreiter, cited in n.4.

³⁹ By contrast, in Book 3, engraved by Louis Huë rather than Du Plessy, some wrong notes were corrected after the first impression.

⁴⁰ This copy of the first impression is preserved at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington (M3.3.c85 p6). See 'Critical commentary', *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre (1713)*, ed. Herlin, p.109.

⁴¹ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, music department, Vm. Coirault 318. The price on the title-page of Le Roux's 1705 publication was less (10 livres unbound). On the copy in the Washington Library of Congress (M22.L6 [Case]), this was added by hand beneath the unbound price: 'relié 11 livres 10 [sols]'

⁴² An announcement in the *Nouveau Mercure* (April 1717, pp.215–16) reveals that the prices of Marais's fourth book (*basse de viole* and continuo parts) were identical to those of the first three books.

⁴³ In the posthumous inventory, the exemplars of the four books found in Couperin's apartment were estimated at 5 livres each. See Antoine, 'Autour de François Couperin', pp.123–4.

⁴⁴ Notarial act transcribed in N. Dufourcq, *Le livre de l'orgue français 1589–1789*, v, *Miscellanea* (Paris, 1982), p.70, cited in L. Braun, 'À la recherche de François Couperin', *Revue de musicologie*, xcv/1 (2009), pp.37–63, at p.38. On 27 March 1710, however, the composer let a house in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, rue des Ursulines, opposite the Hôtel de Louvois, to violinist Pierre Huguenet for six years, indicating that he would continue to reside in Paris on the rue Saint-François, probably to get closer to the Jacobite court in exile in this city since 1689, the place of residence that James III left in 1713 for the Duchy of Lorraine.

⁴⁵ Germain Brice, *Description nouvelle de la ville de Paris* (Paris, 1713), i, p.143.

⁴⁶ There are two exemplars of the first edition of *L'art de toucher le clavecin* in Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, music department, Rés.

F. 69; Bibliothèque Mazarine, 4° A 12568 [Rés], bound with the arms of the comte de Toulouse. The address on the title-page of the 1716 edition is given as 'Chés L'Auteur, au coin de la rüe des fourreurs | vis a vis les Carneaux'.

⁴⁷ He was married to Catherine-Marguerite, baronne de Mont de Lewenberg, and died in 1726. See F. Girard, *Histoire abrégée des officiers suisses* (Fribourg, 1782), iii, pp.46–7.

⁴⁸ This was the town residence of Louis-Alexandre de Bourbon (1681–1737), comte de Toulouse, natural son of Louis XIV and the marquise de Montespan, and one of François Couperin's pupils. He 'continued paying a pension of 1,000 pounds until his death'; see Évrard Titon du Tillet, *Suite du Parnasse françois* (Paris, 1743), entry cclxi, 'François Couperin', p.664.

⁴⁹ Antoine, 'Autour de François Couperin', p.125.

⁵⁰ For a comparison of the two editions of this treatise, see M. Demeilliez, 'Contexts for Couperin's *L'art de toucher le clavecin*', in this issue of *Early Music*.

⁵¹ In 1713³ of Couperin, *Second livre de pièces de clavecin* (late 1717–beginning of 1718)], Préface, p.[v]: 'Ceux qui auront achepté [sic] la méthode en question, en 1716, pourront me la renvoyer, pourvü qu'elle n'ait point été reliée, n'y [sic] gâtée; et je leur en feray donner gratis, un autre exemplaire de l'impression de 1717, ou est un supplément relatif au second livre de mes pièces de Clavecin'. This announcement appears in all the subsequent impressions of Book 2.

⁵² Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre* (1713), 'Avis. donné en 1716' in 1713²⁻³, p.[vi]: 'Ces préludes, même, sont composés sur les tons des pièces dudit Sieur Couperin: tant celles de son premier Livre, que celles du Second, qu'on grave actuellement'.

⁵³ Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre* (1713), 'Avis. donné en 1717', in 1713⁴⁻⁶ p.[vi].

⁵⁴ Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre* (1713), 'Avis. donné en 1717', in 1713⁴⁻⁶, p.[vi], and 1717³⁻⁵ of

Couperin, *Second Livre de pièces de Clavecin*, p.[vi]: 'Ceux qui auront acheté la Méthode en question en 1716, pourront la Renvoyer à l'Auteur pourvü qu'elle n'ait point été reliée, ny gâtée; et il leur en fera donner gratis un Exemplaire de l'impression de 1717, ou est un Suplément relatif au Second Livre de Pièces'.

⁵⁵ 1713³⁻⁴ and 1717³: 'Cette Méthode ce [sic] vend 5^{1^l}'.

⁵⁶ The price of Books 1 and 2, initially 10 and 12 livres respectively, rose to 18 and 20 livres, but fell to 16 and 18 livres in 1724.

⁵⁷ See n.42.

⁵⁸ 'Les Trios. en 4 Livres Séparés, Sçavoir 1^{er}, et 2. dessus de Violon: Basse d'Archet et Basse chifrée Les 4. Parties. 10^{1^l}', in 'Prix des Ouvrages de L'Auteur en 1725', in 1713¹⁰⁻¹¹ of Book 1, p.[vi], and in 1717¹¹ of Book 2, p.[vi].

⁵⁹ 'Pièces de Viole [sic], avec la Basse Chiffrée 6^{1^l}', in 'Prix des Ouvrages de L'Auteur en 1725' in 1713¹² of Book 1, p.[vi]. I have not so far found any impression of Book 2 in which Couperin's last publication, the *Pièces de violes* is listed.

⁶⁰ 'Quatrième Livre de Clavecin. 15^{1^l}', in 1713¹³ of Book 1, p.[vi], and in 1717¹² of Book 2, p.[vi]. After Couperin's death the catalogue remained unchanged: see 1713¹⁴⁻¹⁶ and 1717¹³⁻¹⁵.

⁶¹ Couperin, *Quatrième Livre de pièces de clavecin* (Paris, 1730), [preface], p.[iii]: 'J'espere que ma Famille trouvera dans mes Portefeuilles dequoy me faire regretter'.

⁶² *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise, dédié au roy* (Paris, 1694), ii, p.279: 'Carton plié en deux couvert de peau ou de quelque estoffe, servant à porter des feuilles de papier'.

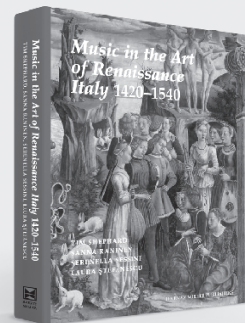
⁶³ Antoine, 'Autour de François Couperin', pp.123–4. Note the absence in this inventory of an exemplar of the *Leçons de ténèbres*.

⁶⁴ Couperin, *Quatrième Livre de pièces de clavecin*, [preface], p.[iii]: 'Mais il faut du moins avoir cette idée pour tacher de meriter une immortalité chimerique ou presque tous les Hommes aspirent'.

MUSIC IN THE ART OF RENAISSANCE ITALY

1420–1540

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