

Liotard's *Le Déjeuner Lavergne*

NEIL JEFFARES¹



[Jean-Étienne Liotard](#)

Le déjeuner LAVERGNE: ?Marguerite (1727–1795), ?Catherine (1723–1757), ou ?Andrienne Lavergne (1728–1768), avec Anne Delessert (1749–1802), plus tard Mme Louis Gleyre

Pastel on paper, 79.7 x 104.5 cm

Signed and dated on music sheet ✓ “Liotard/a lion/1754”

London, National Gallery, inv. NG 6685

[J.49.1795](#)

PROVENANCE: Acqu. Duncannon c.1755, 200 gns [200 pièces, Liotard 1760 autobiographie]; Roehampton, 1785, Musgrave's lists, as “Liotard's two nieces”; Earl of Bessborough, London, Christie's, 7.II.1801, Lot 75*, 85 gns; Aubrey Beauclerk, 5th Duke of St Albans (1740–1802); sale p.m., London, Christie's, 27.III.1802, Lot 78, as “portraits of a young lady and gouvernante at breakfast”, as b/i at Bessborough sale [annotation], 37 gns; [?Roch Jaubert (1756–1813)]; acqu. 1805, as from Bessborough, Luke Foreman (1757–1814), of Upper Harley Street, London; his widow, née Mary Chandler (1763–1834); London, Christie's, 19–20.III.1835, 2nd day, Lot 51, as Le Dejeuné, b/i at 30 gns; Mrs Foreman's nephew and residual legatee, Edward Greene (1795–1887), lieutenant, Royal Artillery, Farnborough Lodge, Hampshire; desc.: his niece, Mrs Thomas L'Estrange Ewan, née Mary Greene (1794–1875), Dedham; her daughter Mrs Henry Golding-Palmer, née Mary Isabella Ewan (1831–1916), Stratford St Mary and 36 Queen's Gate; sale p.m.[?by her niece, Mrs Frederick Arthur Deare, née Margaret Grace Mary Ewan (1879–1966)],

¹ This article first appeared as a [post](#) on my blog neiljeffares.wordpress.com on 25 October 2018. There were several postscripts, to 25 October 2019; these (with some further changes, notably in 2023 when Marie-Anne Lavergne was discovered) have been incorporated (without completely rewriting the essay) into the present version of record, which may be cited as Neil Jeffares, “Liotard's *Le Déjeuner Lavergne*”, *Pastels & pastellists*, http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/Liotard_Dejeuner_Lavergne.pdf. The essay predates the National Gallery 2023/24 exhibition, the catalogue by Francesca Whitlum-Cooper (not discussed in this essay, but see my review “Liotard at the National Gallery”, <https://neiljeffares.wordpress.com/2023/11/15/liotard-at-the-national-gallery/>, 15.XI.2023) and the 2024 NG online catalogue entry, Whitlum-Cooper & al. 2024. One brief update is included below discussing the presence of tin white confirmed by the NG scientific analysis.

London, Christie's, 28.vii.1916, Lot 5 n.r., as of lady and daughter, 1200 gns; Freeman, for Asher Wertheimer; ?sale p.m.[not verified, not in Lugt], 1.x.1918, £1450; Eugene Pinto 1918 [his dau. ∞ Edmond de Rothschild, owner of oil version]; desc.: Major R. J. Pinto, London, 1978; his son George Richard Pinto (1929–2018); dep.: London, National Gallery, .xi.2018, inv. L1246; acqu. acceptance in lieu of £8.76 million tax, 2019, announced 20.v.2020

LITERATURE: Liotard, autobiographie de 1760, “un de ses principaux ouvrages...ses nièces”; Moücke 1762, iv, p. 276, “due quadri...de suoi nipoti, uno pagato dugento ghinee...d'un Cannon”; Liotard 1781, p. 57; Tilanus 1897, pp. 139, 209, “crayon d'une execution inimitable”, as of “Mlle Lavergne, fille de Pierre Lavergne et de Mme Lavergne, née Liotard, et sa nièce Clarence, fille de sa sœur”, as a/r pnt. as 1750; Margaret G. M. Williams, letter, *Country life*, 12.ix.1952, p. 770 repr.; Fosca 1956, pp. 64f; Previtali 1966, pl. iii; L&R 164 repr., as ?Royal Academy 1774 [??confusion with La Beurrée]; Loche 1980, no. 65; Anderson 1994, fig. 25; Perez 1997, fig. 2; Roethlisberger 2001b, fig. 1; R&L 299, fig. 435; Kisluk-Grosheide & Munger 2010, fig. 60; Lyon 2012a, p. 257; Koos 2014, figs. 162, 163; Liotard 2015a fig. 63; Loche 2015; Sebag-Montefiore 2016, pp. 151, 168, fig. 4; Liotard 2018, p. 24 repr.; [Jeffares 2018n](#); *Cultural gifts scheme & acceptance in lieu report 2020*, no. 17 repr., pp. 32ff, as of mother and daughter [?]; *The times*, 21.xii.2020, p. 11 repr.; Baker 2023, fig. 29; Neil Jeffares, “Liotard at the National Gallery”, <https://neiljeffares.wordpress.com/2023/11/15/liotard-at-the-national-gallery/>, 15.xi.2023; Whitlum-Cooper & al. 2024; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, [J.49.1795](#)

EXHIBITION: *Discover Liotard and the Lavergne family breakfast*, National Gallery, 16.xi.2023 – 3.iii.2024. Cat. Francesca Whitlum-Cooper

RELATED WORKS: repl., pnt., 81x103, 1773 (Liotard; London, Christie's, 15.iv.1774, Lot 76, est. £100, b/i at 47 gns; liste d'Angiviller, no. 65; desc.: Mlle M. A. Liotard, Amsterdam; acqu. 1873, ff7500, Léon Gauchez; Edmond de Rothschild, Paris, 1897; James A. de Rothschild, Waddesdon; pc 2008). Exh.: Amsterdam 1872, no. 129, as “Het ontbijt”, geschilderd 1750 te Lyon. Lit.: Liotard 1781, pp. 48f, 57; Humbert, Revilliod & Tilanus 1897, no. 111, repr. p. 73; L&R 165 repr.; Loche 1980, p. 199f; Lippincott 1985, p. 128 n.r.; R&L 495, fig. 699; Koos 2014, figs. 163, 164

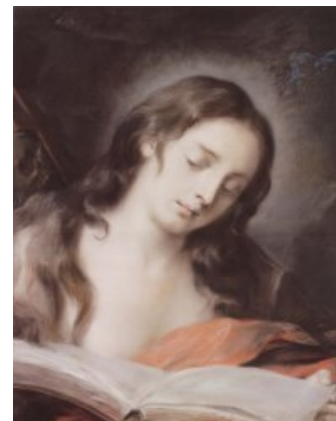
GENEALOGIES: [Liotard](#)

IN THE GEMÄLDEGALERIE ALTE MEISTER in Dresden (until 6 January 2019), you can see the Liotard [exhibition](#) “*Das schönste Pastell, das man je gesehen hat.*” *Das Schokoladenmädchen von Jean-Etienne Liotard*, based around the hugely famous *Belle Chocolatière* (left; known under various names, and annoyingly filed in my *Dictionary* as [J.49.1342](#), under the false name of Gräfin Dietrichstein – lexicographers² have to stick to rules even when they yield odd results). The title of the show – “the most beautiful pastel ever seen” – is attributed to Rosalba Carriera, but comes to us indirectly from a letter by Algarotti to Graf Brühl:



Je ne parlerai pas ici de la Magdelaine de la Rosalba, regardée par elle même comme son chef d'œuvre, ni de la Stoubmenche [de Liotard] qui a été considérée par tous les Peintres de Venise, et par la Rosalba même comme le plus beau Pastel qu'on ait jamais vu.

But the key here (after what today we would call full disclosure: Algarotti had just bought the *Chocolatière* for Dresden) is the date, 23 April 1746: some 18 years before the pastel reproduced at the top of this post, *Le Déjeuner des demoiselles Lavergne* (or whatever it



should be called – it is no. [J.49.1795](#) in the online³ *Dictionary of pastellists*), had been produced.

² Pastels in the *Dictionary* are arranged alphabetically by the sitter's name where known, including under names by which they were previously known unless a more accurate name has emerged (when a cross reference sends the reader to the better name). It usually works quite well as a compromise.

³ Most readers of this blog will already know that the *Dictionary* is online at www.pastellists.com. Articles on individual artists can be accessed from the Artists tab on the home page; the Liotard article is split into several pdfs. Each of the more than 35,000 pastels in the work is given a unique digital object identifier, such as [J.49.1795](#), which are arranged in double decimal sequence throughout. You can search for these using the search box on the home page on the website which takes you to the pdf, then search again within. You can also usually get there quickly by searching “[J.49.1795](#)”, in quotes, in Google. In this blog post I use abbreviated bibliographic references; these can all be found in the *Dictionary*. I've written previously about Liotard on this blog, but a summary of those miscellaneous posts can be found in my essay [Liotardiana](#).

in public since 1916, many Liotard experts – including Marcel Roethlisberger, author with Renée Loche of the monumental and definitive catalogue raisonné on the artist (I shall refer to the 2008 edition below as R&L) – believe it has a fair claim to compete with if not supplant the *Chocolatière* for the “fairest of them all” title. I’m not sure whether such a discussion is particularly fruitful; whether many (unless perhaps they shared the artist’s extreme piety) would today regard the *Madeleine* (Dresden; right) as Rosalba’s chef-d’œuvre; or, even if quoted correctly, whether Rosalba herself had ever seen anything by La Tour or Perronneau – nor is this post the place to compare and contrast what Liotard was doing in Lyon in 1754 with what say Perronneau was doing there just five years later (see [here](#)), or for that matter with the pastel which La Tour was working on in Paris the same year, and would exhibit the following year in the Salon de 1755: his monumental pastel of [Mme de Pompadour](#), star of the recent show in the Louvre (below).⁵



Nevertheless I’ve been prompted to think a little more about *Le Déjeuner*, and in particular to tidy up a few of the loose ends surrounding it – some minute points about the history of the pastel, followed by the question of the identification of the sitters. There is no need for me to repeat R&L’s full and informative discussion, which brings together literature going back to the mention in Liotard’s own 1760 autobiographie, “un de ses principaux ouvrages...ses nièces”, as well as Moücke’s biography for the *Museo Fiorentino* (published 1762, iv, p. 276), “due quadri...de suoi nipoti, uno pagato dugento ghinee...d’un Cannon [Duncannon].”

The work is clearly (and unambiguously) signed and dated (on the sheet of music protruding from the drawer) “Liotard/a lion/1754”: earlier writers have been confused by the existence of a later replica, in oil, made by Liotard in 1773, and the pastel had also been reported as dated 1750 by writers up to the first edition of L&R in 1978. This may have been because everyone thought

⁴ At the time this essay was first issued; it is now in the National Gallery.

⁵ A further comparison might be made with Francis Cotes’s pastel of the Gulston boys (Getty; [J.243.371](#)), made in London in the same year as the Liotard.

that Liotard was in London 1753–55, but as the notice in the *Public advertiser* (13 March 1755) that I first published in 2013 made clear, Liotard made a short visit back to Lion in the summer of 1754:

To the CURIOUS in PAINTING.
MR. LIOTARD gives Notice that he is
come back to London, chiefly in order to finish some Portraits
he had begun before he went to France last Summer; and therefore
does not intend to make here a longer Stay than will be required for
that Purpose.
He has brought over a Couple of large Conversation Pictures
in Crayons, of his highest finishing.
He lives in the same House in Golden-square.

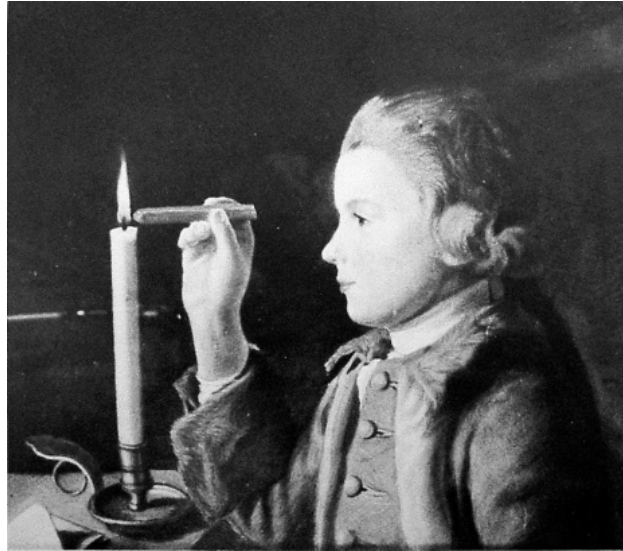
Undoubtedly one of the conversation pieces he mentions was *Le Déjeuner*; the other presumably was *L'Écriture*, the 1752 portrait (Vienna, KHM; J.49.1763) of his nephew Jacques-Antoine Lavergne with a boy sometimes described as Lavergne's nephew, but identified by the artist as “un laquais” in his 1763 letter to Bessborough, which is far more specific than the passing reference to the “portraits of his nephews and nieces” on which this fanciful identification hinges. I analyse the picture in depth in my [essay](#) “*L'Écriture* deciphered” (*q.v.*; the essay includes some material on the Lavergne family background which I do not repeat here). Most readers of this blog will have seen it in the Liotard exhibition in London in 2015.



The visual parallels are striking, particularly if the pictures were hung side by side (evidently with *L'Écriture* to the right): both have two figures, one large, one small; all four hands showing; in the foreground a table laden with objects with which the artist can demonstrate his skill as a painter of still life. Harmonious colouring is achieved by a predominantly narrow range of tonality, the red sealing wax in *L'Écriture* playing the role of the red ribbon emerging from the partly open

drawer⁶ in *Le Déjeuner* in defining the overall tonality. Together the objects define the bourgeois preoccupations from eating to writing, from literature to music.

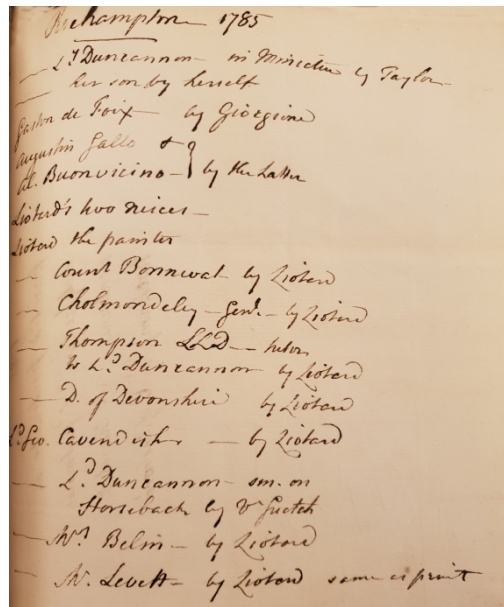
Possibly the same boy appears in profile, again with a candle, in another piece (J.49.2441) which I identified as by Liotard in my *Burlington Magazine* review of R&L (May 2009) – later confirmed by Marcel Roethlisberger in his “Liotard mis à jour” article in *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 2014 (fig. 3):



Le Déjeuner, but not the others, was bought by Lord Duncannon (later 2nd Earl of Bessborough) for the then enormous sum of 200 guineas. Modern day comparisons are of limited value, but using official inflation figures (my Twitter followers will know how useless I think such indices are) this equates to roughly £40,000 in today’s money. By comparison the 120 zecchini he received for the *Chocolatière* in 1745 amounts to some £12,000. We know Bessborough had *Le Déjeuner* by the time of the 1760 and 1762 biographies I mention above, as both report the sum. I can also add to the history that it was seen by Sir William Musgrave⁷ at Roehampton in 1785, when he described it as of “Liotard’s two nieces”:

⁶ Liotard returned to this device in a still life painted when he was 80.

⁷ Although the existence of Musgrave’s lists was publicised by Arlene Meyer in *The Walpole Society* in 1988, you still have to consult the original manuscripts in the British Library. The entries are all perfunctory, often tantalising, in this case with limited information – but in others (such as the Dr Thompson entry several lines below, J.49.2324) offer conclusive proof of my identification where previous researchers have erred.



It was however apparently overlooked by the Rev. Daniel Lysons, who noted in 1792 “in the breakfast room [at Roehampton] are several [portraits] in crayons of English gentlemen, principally in Turkish dresses, by Liotard.”

Bessborough’s enthusiasm for Liotard is well known (although Christie’s 1801 sale catalogue of his “well known, valuable and truly capital collection of pictures” omitted Liotard’s name from the two dozen short listed old masters on the title page); he even commissioned copies of two Liotards (a Turkish woman; and a Turkish woman with girl, 1745–46; in 1748 Pond did a pastel of his wife, née Lady Caroline Cavendish, whom he had married in 1739). Bessborough also owned at least eight pastels by Rosalba.

We know that Bessborough was concerned about the stability of pastels, and corresponded with Liotard about fixing methods. Liotard recommended Jurine, although whether Bessborough employed him, or on which pastels, is not so clear.⁸ (Some of the other Bessborough pastels have not survived well; my [article](#) on Jurine, which discusses his introduction to and work for the Earl, suggests he was markedly less competent than his rival Loriot notwithstanding Liotard’s assurance to the contrary.)

The 2nd Earl of Bessborough died in 1793, and his son inherited financial problems, leading to the disposal of the collection. *Le Déjeuner* was apparently purchased (7 February 1801, Lot 75*, as “a Lady and child at breakfast, in crayons, an inimitable performance”) at, or immediately after⁹, the sale, by Aubrey Beauclerk, 5th Duke of St Albans (1740–1802), who in turn died soon after, so that the pastel was again put up at auction (not recorded in R&L), at Christie’s, 27 March 1802, Lot 78, as “portraits [sic] of a young lady and gouvernante at breakfast”. In 1805 it was bought (apparently directly¹⁰ from Bessborough through Christie’s) by Luke Foreman (1757–1814), from a wealthy family of Portuguese merchants, who formed an art collection with his wife, née Mary Chandler (1763–1834). It was particularly rich in Dutch pictures (Jan Steen, Teniers etc., and including a flower piece by the painter Liotard so much admired, Jan van

⁸ Jurine’s advertisement claiming Bessborough as a client should be treated with due caution. I have not so far been able to inspect the back of the pastel for evidence of when it was last opened, but if Jurine worked on it, the dates would surely be between 1763 and 1765. Scientific tests (known as enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) might attempt to detect the presence of fish-glue.

⁹ An annotation in a copy (at the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap, Amsterdam) of the St Albans’s sale catalogue states that the picture was bought in at the Bessborough sale, at £89/5/-. But as St Albans was Bessborough’s son-in-law the transaction may have been a fiction.

¹⁰ Neither R&L nor other accounts mention the appearance in the St Albans sale; it may be that Christie’s slipped it into another vendor’s auction. The 1801 price of 85 gns is roughly £6600 today; the 1802 37 gns a mere £2900, both credibly below any reserve, and it has been suggested that St Albans’s purchase in the 1801 sale was not a real transaction.

Huysum). Some of their collection was acquired by Mr and Mrs Foreman on a Continental tour between 1802 and 1804, in France, Italy and Germany, buying up pictures that the Napoleonic wars had made available. After Foreman's death, his widow (who went on to acquire and furnish Farnborough Hill) prepared a detailed inventory of their picture collection, recording details of each purchase.¹¹ In relation to the Liotard however all that is recorded against "a large Crayons Drawing/a Lady & Child, Le Dejeuné/by Liotard y^e Turk/Lyons 1751" is "Christie's sale of Earl Besboro', "April 1805":

Pictures and Drawings to	at Landry place by St. L.	since the year 1790	
Subject	Master	when let	When taken L S D
Surgeon & his Patient from Mr. Kobitz collection in France	by Van Toll	Philippe April 6 th 1800.	6 th Apr 6 th 1805. 63
Two Views Architectural in Rome: very large.	Panini	Philippe	April 1805 80 80
Dutch Courtship	Long	Sydney	April 7 th
a large Crayons Drawing a Lady & Child, Le Dejeuné	by Liotard of Turk of Lyons 1751 -	Christie of Besboro'	April 1805. 86

In a very long will she bequeathed many of the pictures individually (not to mention the marble cistern that had belonged to William Beckford), among them landscapes by Canaletto and Hackert, but there is no mention of the Liotard:

I give to my brother John all the Pictures that fine large Cistern of White Marble formerly at Beckford's & all the Marble Ornaments out a part of it. Also I give my brother John a set of two Landscapes of Drawing & Engraving by St. Leger. Also two views on the of Rome by Panini also the View of Holland by St. Leger also the great View by St. Leger also the Canaletto of St. Mark's Place also the View of Capri by St. Leger: all in Dining room also I give him the Venetian view in St. Leger's and also the view of the Venetian also the View of the Table bought at Besboro' also I dedicate to my brother John the Pictures of my Son & Mary Foreman.

So it went into her sale at Christie's, 30 March 1835, where it was bought in at 30 guineas, and passed to her residual legatee and nephew, Edward Greene. It remained within the Foreman/Chandler/Greene family until the death (114 years after Foreman's purchase) of Greene's great-niece, Mrs Golding-Palmer, and appeared in her sale, again at Christie's, 28 July 1916, Lot 5 (as of a lady and her daughter), reaching 1200 guineas (about £115,000 today). It was bought for Asher Wertheimer, and sold shortly after his death, in October 1918, for a modest profit, to Eugene Pinto (R&L describe this as a "vente après décès", but it appears not to have been an auction). It remained in that family for many more years, and its present condition must owe something to the fact that it has been displaced so rarely.¹²

So who are the sitters? Perhaps after all it doesn't really matter – not because I don't think that sitters in portraits don't matter, but because in a sense this is not a portrait, nor even a conversation piece (as Jean-Rodolphe Sinner observed of another Liotard composition, Tronchin with his Rembrandt, "c'est plutôt un tableau qu'un portrait"¹³) – nor perhaps does it even belong in the "genre" genre: it is rather a still life with coffee set and two humans in attendance. The papers in which the child's hair is being curled, the impasto reflections on the coffee pot, even the pins holding up the lady's apron are as prominent as the faces. Visually only

¹¹ Charles Sebag-Montefiore, "A Regency collection: Luke Foreman (1757–1814) and his wife Mary (1764?–1834)" (*Furniture History*, lii, 2016, pp. 143–79), provides a detailed account of the collection, and acquired the inventory which passed through Bonhams in a manuscript [sale](#) in 2009. I am most grateful to him for permitting me to reproduce the relevant page in the inventory.

¹² And not I suggest to Jurine's ministrations: see note above.

¹³ Jean-Rodolphe Sinner, *Voyage historique et littéraire dans la Suisse occidentale*, 1781, II, p. 42. The same phrase appeared in relation to Mme Vigée Le Brun's portrait of Hubert Robert in the Salon de 1789: comte de Mende-Maupas, *Supplément des remarques sur les ouvrages...*, Paris, 1789, p. 1 (CD 414).

the vast depth of empty background is odd. The overall brown hue might bring Mariette's criticism of Liotard's work to mind: "la couleur tirait presque toujours sur celle du pain d'épice" – although this is darker than the habitual background in his portraits. The French will not take this quintessential Liotard to their hearts; but everyone else will.¹⁴

You can see immediately how Liotard differs from the French tradition (and indeed that Liotard was not a French painter) by comparing *Le Déjeuner* with a picture by Jean-Siméon Chardin, a painter whose influence on Liotard runs deep. A telling example is his much loved *Petite Maîtresse d'école* from the 1740 salon (London, National Gallery, NG 4077).¹⁵ Chardin, the still-life painter, concentrates on the faces and the bond between the girl and her pupil; Liotard, the portraitist, focuses on the accessories, and puts the aunt's face in half-shadow.



As we know, when Liotard returned to England in 1773, he took the opportunity to copy Bessborough's pastel, in oil.

¹⁴ The oil repetition was offered to d'Angiviller in 1785, but rejected – at least it escaped the annotation on the *Liseuse*: "detestable".

¹⁵ Generally thought to have been painted c.1736, Liotard had left Paris in 1735; but he may well have been aware of the *Lépicie* engraving (exhibited at the same salon, and known throughout Europe), and he returned to Paris in 1748. In any case the influences of Chardin on Liotard's work were profound.



What is perhaps astonishing is just how closely he has followed every stroke of the pastel in this repetition – just as a professional copyist would attempt, rather than (as say a La Tour) simply recreating the effect. No attempt has been made to correct some of the errors of drawing, for example the angle of the spouts of both pots. There are however several interesting differences. One is that Liotard has added a shadow partly to fill the void at the centre of the picture – but at the same time has accentuated the sense of emptiness by enlarging the height; he also seems minutely to have changed the inclination of the older sitter’s head, tilting it away from us – but careful measurement suggests this is an illusion, created partly by the shadow and partly by the accentuated modelling and colouring on the faces.¹⁶ The child’s face and eye colour, and both sitters’ mouths, seem different. Secondly the reflections of the double window on the milk jug and coffee pot are much crisper on the pastel than the oil; while the blue colour, so central to the pattern on the china in the pastel, appears in the oil to have turned to an anaemic yellowish-brown: he may well have used smalt (the girl’s apron and hair ribbon have not faded, and may perhaps be in Prussian blue). While there is a general darkening of the colour in the oil, it is noticeable that what appears to be fading of the red lake on the older sitter’s dress, exposing the darker red intended to be the shadows, is captured precisely in the oil. Had the lake colours in the pastel already faded in the 19 years it had been exposed to light? Quite possibly.¹⁷ On the other hand the fading in the little girl’s yellow dress in the pastel means we can no longer see the highlights carefully depicted in the oil: either Liotard recreated them, or they have faded since.

Visually the most striking part of the picture is the extraordinary brilliance of the breakfast set, whose complexity takes that of the *Chocolatière* to a new level. Perhaps the weakest parts of the drawing are the hands, with an absence of anatomy within the distinctive red outlines: the artist’s lack of formal training is often most exposed here, although there are a few examples (such as the Geneva self-portrait, [J.49.1014](#)) that show that he could do hands when he chose.¹⁸

Unsatisfactory passages are also found mainly in the flesh areas, and appear to result from overworking these parts with too many layers of pastel. One possible explanation is that the scale of this work (and its companion) forced Liotard to work on paper rather than vellum (it was only

¹⁶ There appears to be a pentimento in the outline of the sitter’s proper left shoulder which may contribute to this illusion.

¹⁷ This might explain the colour of the reflection of the red ribbon in the edge of the table top: clearly red in the oil, but neutral in the pastel.

¹⁸ *Lady Fawkener* ([J.49.1469](#)), for example, is not one of those: at first sight one of the most beautiful pastels ever made, the modelling of her hands is below the level of a student.

ten years later that he was able to source single sheets of parchment for even larger works such as Mme de Vermenoux remerçant Apollon, ^{J.49.16}), interfering with his ability to erase passages. The reason why Liotard needed to make these alterations is probably connected with his use of tin white in these area, as revealed in the National Gallery's recent technical investigation. Tin white is not a suitable pigment for painting, although it is used in enamels, and Liotard was probably unique in using it in pastels at the time; he may well have done so in an attempt to recreate on paper the brilliant luminosity achievable with parchment, but its rapid oxidation may have caused him to rethink.¹⁹ The effect is all too visible:



Particularly for Liotard, the painter of surfaces, perfection in textures matters in a way it might not with, say, Chardin; and some of his other work sets a high standard for what he advertised as “his highest finishing”. This is where we confront the apparent contradiction between what we see – a rather thick impasto in some of the most important areas –with what we know and admire in the best Liotard pastels (the absolute clarity and astonishing luminosity achieved in say Dresden’s *Chocolatière*, Munich’s *Petit déjeuner* or the Getty’s *Countess of Athlone*, both significantly on parchment) and with his theoretical work, where the strongest advice is given to avoid visible strokes. Lippincott (1985), followed by Koos (2014), attempts to square these with the “point de touches” rule, citing Liotard’s discussion on p. 48f of the 1781 *Traité des principes et des règles de la peinture* which of course refers to his own oil version, not to the pastel:

J’ai dans mon cabinet de peinture à Genève un tableau de ma composition; il représente une dame ayant devant elle un cabaret de la Chine, & donnant une tasse de café à sa fille; il y a des épaisseurs de couleurs, sans être des touches, sur les tasses, sur le pot et sur la cafetière, pour mieux exprimer le luisant de ces corps, & mieux les faire avancer; aussi j’ose me flatter que dans ce tableau les différents objets ont autant de relief, de saillant & de vigueur que la peinture puisse en faire paraître, tous les objets étant très finis, & sans aucune touche.

Liotard’s willingness to copy his most important work, often far later, is not unusual. In an earlier blog [post](#) I discussed the case of the repetition of Mme Necker, undertaken with a view to persuading her husband to give his nephew a job rather than (as the Empress Maria Theresia thought) because he couldn’t stand the distress of not owning his masterpieces (“il a fait voir de la peine de n’être plus possesseur de ce tableau”). That of course could well have been the motivation for the copy of *Le Déjeuner*. But Liotard’s correspondence and Graf Zinzendorf’s evidence remind us of just how labour-intensive making these copies was – perhaps taking considerably longer than the original.

¹⁹ These observations withheld until publication of Whitlum-Cooper & al. 2024.

I digress: the sitters, and their relationship with one another, must be discussed. Liotard has several references to them as mother and daughter. One is in a letter to Lord Bessborough, 28 June 1763. Another is in the list of his works sent to d'Angiviller in 1785; and there are two references in his 1781 *Traité*. It is clear in all of these that Liotard has no interest in identifying the sitters or in describing them in any other context than as elements in a still life (nor would d'Angiviller or readers of the *Traité* have been interested in their names, and perhaps not Bessborough either). In contrast in his 1760 autobiographie Liotard only lists “deux tableaux, faisant le sujet de ses neveux & nieces”, hardly specific enough to decide the question. As explained below, Tilanus solved the problem of the absence of any Lavergne mother/daughter combination by identifying the girl as an orphan niece: but because he had the wrong date for the picture, he got the wrong niece.

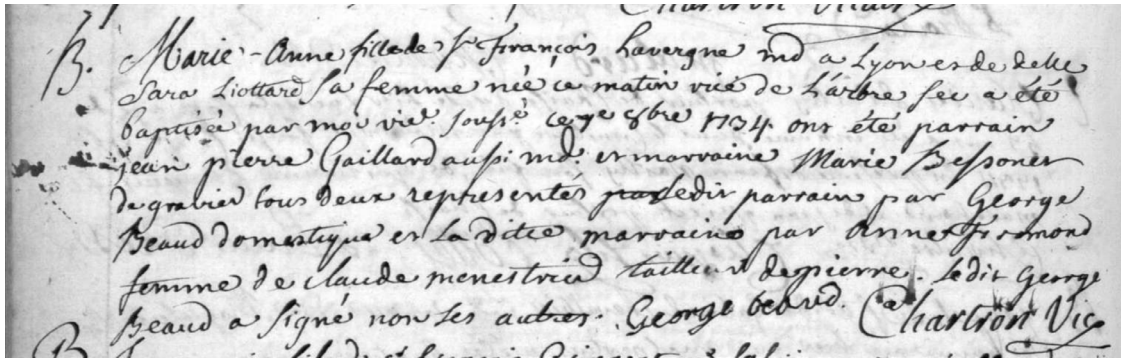
The conclusion R&L come to is that the older figure is of Catherine Lavergne, Liotard's niece, and the little girl is her orphan niece, Mlle Clarens. Their argument synthesises the information given by Tilanus, who had married the artist's great-granddaughter and vouchsafed the name Clarence, with the repeated mentions (four) by Liotard that the subjects were a mother and daughter. The argument was that Catherine may have adopted her recently orphaned niece. Catherine incidentally I can confirm (R&L ask the question) never married.

Before reading any further ask yourself what age they are. An impossible question, as always, particularly with Liotard. We can see this from the pastel of one of the lady's sisters, whom we know from Liotard's own list of picture in 1785 was Marianne, depicted much earlier (1746) as *La Liseuse* (1.49.1765, Rijksmuseum):

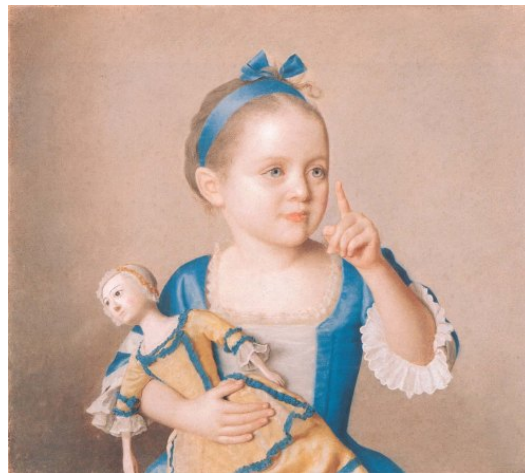


Until my discovery of the existence of a sister Marie-Anne (first published here in 2023), the sitter was assumed to be the eldest girl, born in Geneva in 1717 and called just Anne in all official documents (she actually died in 1788, not 1790 as R&L also erroneously print), making her 29 at the time of the pastel: R&L found this surprising but not impossible (“âgée ici de 29 ans (on lui en donnerait moins)”). In fact, as we know from her burial entry, in the parish of Caluire-et-Cuire near Lyon, 26.IX.1809, Marie-Anne was born in Lyon in 1733/34: further

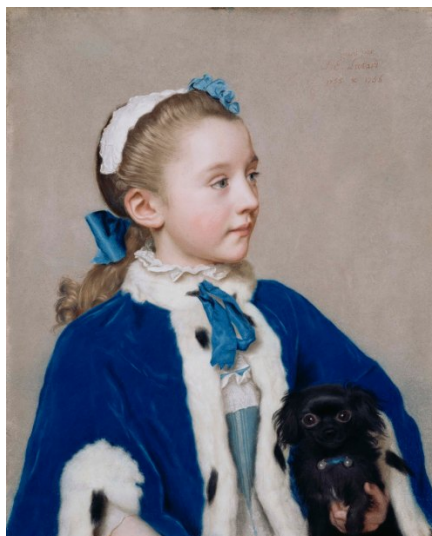
research in the Lyon parish registers produces her baptismal record, in the parish of Saint-Pierre-Saint-Saturnin, on 7.X.1734, and so she was 12, not 29:



My guess for the older figure in *Le Déjeuner* is that she could be anywhere between 18 and 35. But I think the younger girl can be aged with more precision. Remember that that was how I solved the [mystery of the cover girl](#) in the Liotard 2015 exhibition:



Not Marianne Liotard at all, but her sister Marie-Thérèse, the Empress Maria Theresia's goddaughter (which is why Liotard sent her portrait to Vienna) – aged 6. Looking at the proportions of the body, hands and head, isn't the girl in *Le Déjeuner* the same age? And certainly not the 10 or so R&L suggest? For another parallel, here's the exquisite pastel in the Getty (J.49.163; it may well be another contender for the most beautiful Liotard): Frederica Maria van Reede-Athlone is shown at the age of seven, and is surely more advanced physically than the little girl in *Le Déjeuner*.



For we have to tie this in with the genealogy of the family, which you can find [here](#) (somewhat expanded from R&L). The genealogical discussions to date, pursued with some depth by Marie-Félicie Perez in *Genava* in 1997 (but not without error and numerous omissions), and summarised by R&L (but still incompletely, with several important errors), rely on the fairly thorough genealogical records of the state of Geneva, and the desperately inadequate records for Protestants in Lyon, which for the period in question record only deaths. The branch of the family which concerns us here is that of Liotard's elder sister Sara (1692–1757) who, in 1713, married François Lavergne (1678–1752), a négociant in Geneva, who settled in Lyon between 1732 (when the youngest son Hugues was baptised in Geneva) and 1734 (when Marianne was born in Lyon); the death of their four-and-a-half-year-old daughter Élisabeth was recorded also in Lyon in 1735).

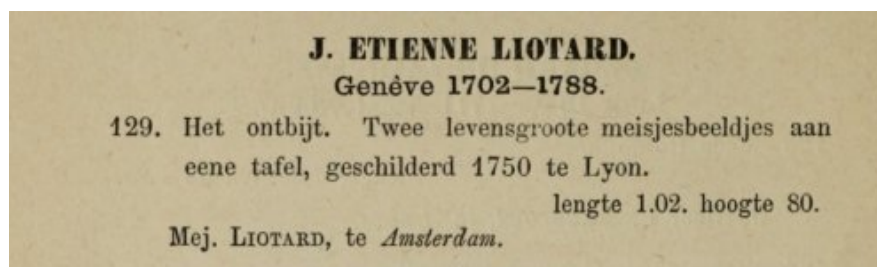
This is as full an account as I have been able to glean from the available records of the branch that interests us:

⇒⇒ Sara (Genève 12.iii.1692 – Lyon 31.v.1757) ∞ Genève, Temple de La Madeleine 26.ii.1713 François Lavergne (1678–Lyon, ég. protestant 25.x.1752), fils de Daniel Mialhe La Vergne, de Vabre près Castres, négociant de Genève, établi à Lyon
 ⇒⇒⇒ Jean Lavergne (Geneva 27.iii.1715 – Lyon 19.vii.1776), négociant
 ⇒⇒⇒ Anne Lavergne (Geneva 24.ii.1717 – Lyon 29.ix.1788sa) {*?Liotard*} [erroneously identified as Liotard's liseuse]
 ⇒⇒⇒ Jeanne Lavergne (Geneva 30.i.1720– Lyon 27.i.1749) ∞ François Delessert (1721 – Lyon 15.iii.1752), natif de Cossonay en Suisse, négociant à Lyon, fils de Gabriel de Lessert (1682–1738), conseiller de Cossonay
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒ Anne (Lyon .i.1749 – Cossonay 15.v.1802) {*Liotard*} ∞ Cossonay 1785 Louis-Samuel Gleyre (1751–1815), pasteur depuis 1775, inspecteur d'écoles, juge de paix
 ⇒⇒⇒ Marie-Louise Lavergne (Genève 26.vii.1721– Lyon 27.ix.1745) ∞ Genève 26.iv.1740 Daniel Clarenc (Puylaurens, ND du Lac 6.ii.1709 – Puylaurens, Prot. 15.iv.1781), de la paroisse de Saint-Loup à Puylaurens, négociant à Lyon {*?Liotard*}
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒ Marie-Françoise Clarenc (1741–14.xii.1759) ∞ 8.i.1759 Jacob Vernes (Genève 31.v.1728–22.x.1791), philosophe, pasteur à Céligny [∞ 2° 1764 Marianne Simonde]
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Anne Vernes (5.xii.1759–15.vii.1770)
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒ Pierre Clarenc (Lyon 16.i.1744 –Toulouse 5.vi.1803){*?Liotard*} ∞ Puylaurens 10.vi.1770 [contrat 29.v.1771] Elisabeth Favat (1749–1791)
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Daniel Clarenc (1772–1772)
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Anne-Philippine Clarenc (7.ix.1773–31.v.1826) {*Liotard*} ∞ Toulouse 10.i.1792 Pierre Sol de Beauclair (1754–1814), général de brigade, Légion d'honneur
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Edouard-Pierre Sol (1801–1879)
 ⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Alix-Marguerite-Philippine (1784–p.1810) ∞ Toulouse 10.iv.1802 Marc-Antoine Bermond Lacombe

- ⇒⇒⇒ Catherine Lavergne (Genève 3.v.1723 – Lyon 27.i.1757sa) {*Liotard*}
- ⇒⇒⇒ Jacques-Antoine Lavergne (Genève 24.xii.1724 – Lyon 8.x.1781sa), citoyen de Genève, banquier à Lyon {*Liotard*}
- ⇒⇒⇒ Marguerite Lavergne (Genève 27.vi.1727 – Cossonay 2.viii.1795) {*Liotard*}
- ⇒⇒⇒ Anne-Andrienne Lavergne (Genève 11.viii.1728 – Lyon 27.iv.1768sa)
- ⇒⇒⇒ Jeanne-Elisabeth Lavergne (Genève 22.xii.1730 – Lyon 17.ix.1735)
- ⇒⇒⇒ Hugues Lavergne (Genève 20.iii.1732 – Lyon 21.xii.1768), négociant à Lyon
- ⇒⇒⇒ Marie-Anne, dite Marianne, Lavergne (Lyon 7.x.1734 – Caluire-et-Cuire 25.ix.1809sa) {*Liotard*}

From the pedigree I think you can see that the identification even of the older figure is far from certain, *pace* R&L: although Marianne can be eliminated as her face and hair colour are wrong, and while Jeanne, Louise and Élisabeth were all dead, I think either Marguerite or Andrienne (respectively 27 and 26 at the date of the pastel) might be shown just as easily as Catherine (but Anne – the original candidate for the Liseuse – at 37 seems too old). We cannot even be sure that the girls aren't children of the négociant Jean Lavergne, who died in 1776, not 1729 as R&L have, and was old enough to have a 20-year-old daughter (although there is no indication that he married).

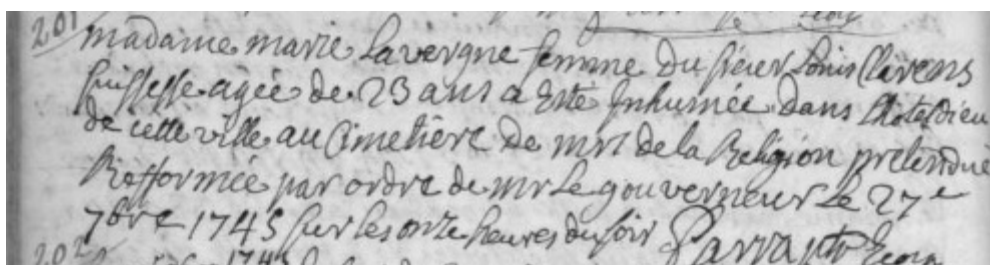
I think the key thing that has been overlooked is that when Tilanus was proposing to identify the little girl as Mlle Clarens or Clarence, he believed the pastel was dated 1750 when a six-year-old daughter could well have been born to the Lavergne sister who had died in 1745. Here is how the oil was described in the Amsterdam exhibition of 1872 (overlooked until I published it in 2015):



In 1844 Marie-Anne Liotard-Crommelin (the artist's granddaughter, Mme Tilanus's aunt, and the lender in 1872) merely mentions²⁰ "Lavergne & nicht"; Tilanus (in 1897 – and his familiarity with the family genealogy may be gauged by his thinking that Sara Liotard married a *Pierre Lavergne*) may well have supplied the name based solely on the only reference to Clarens in Liotard's own writing – in a letter to François Tronchin, from Lyon, 6 April 1781, where he reported "j'ay commencé 2 portraits mon petit Neveu et niece Claring mes trois nieces Nanette Gotton et Marianne ont une son extraordinaire de satisfaire a tous mes gouts..." The absence of punctuation is unhelpful, but R&L are probably correct to read this as portraits of his great-nephew and great-niece Clarens, while the three nieces merely looked after his needs (R&L suggest respectively Anne, Marguerite and Andrienne, but Andrienne was already dead). Since only two nieces, strictly speaking, had survived, one suspects that Liotard was using these terms loosely. It could even be that Liotard uses "petit" as a physical description of the first, and the list mixes nieces and great-nieces. We don't know if the two portraits were completed.

The archives are resoundingly silent on the Clarens family, although that is the spelling on Louise's burial entry:

²⁰ In relation to the oil repetition which she owned until her death; it was subsequently acquired by the Rothschild family. "Nota der schilderijen overgenomen door Mejuffrouw M.A. Liotard van deszelfds broeder den Heere J.T. Liotard 12 July 1844." The Hague, Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, Familie-archief Liotard, FA/205/7/U7.



I suspected (encouraged by Liotard’s phonetic spelling) that this might be a confusion with the Clarenc family of Protestant bankers in Lyon, originating in Puylaurens – and on checking the Geneva state archives I found that indeed Marie-Louise Lavergne did not marry “Louis Clarenc” but, on 26 April 1740, a Daniel Clarenc from Puylaurens.²¹ There are several homonyms, but this was Daniel Clarenc (1709–1781), bourgeois de Puylaurens.²² (Although Puylaurens is a long way from either Lyon or Geneva, it should be remembered that François Lavergne actually came from Vabre, which is just the other side of Castres from Puylaurens.) He was the son of another Daniel Clarenc and his wife, Marthe de Vialas; one of her brothers was Paul Vialas, seigneur de Saint-Loup (–1765), officier d’infanterie, after whose death Daniel Jr and his brother Samuel reached an agreement²³ concerning family legacies from their uncles, which was probably the source of the title of “de Saint-Loup” which appears on the back of a fine Liotard portrait which R&L (no. 354, my [J.49.1262](#)) classified as an inconnu. Saint-Loup is also the name of the parish where Clarenc lived and was buried in 1781.

There was a daughter: Marie-Françoise Clarenc, who married Jacob Vernes in 1759, dying later that year in her eighteenth year, a few days after giving birth to a daughter, Anne, who herself would die young. (Jacob Vernes was a Protestant pastor at Céligny and Geneva, and something of a philosopher; a close friend of Voltaire, his refutation of Rousseau’s *Émile* was commended by Charles Bonnet to Greve Carl De Geer.) Marie-Françoise Clarenc would have been an improbable 12 or 13 at the time of the Liotard pastel. There was also a son: a Pierre Clarenc old enough to marry an Elisabeth Favar in Puylaurens, 10 June 1770 (and in fact born in 1744). He was surely the négociant à Lyon mentioned in Lüthy²⁴ as a partner with Jean-Louis Grenus, citoyen de Genève in the firm of Gaillard, Grenus & Cie de Lyon from 1779 on (the Vernes were also connected with the firm). Pierre and Marie-Françoise might of course have had an unrecorded younger sister: but she would have been at least 8¾ at the time of the pastel, and she was not then an orphan as her father was still alive.²⁵ And while the 1781 letter indicates that *a* Mlle Clarenc survived, there is nothing other than Tilanus’s statement to identify the little girl as her (and that might be his false deduction from his mistaken belief that the pastel was dated 1750): indeed she is most likely to be the Anne-Philippine Clarenc (1773–1826), later Mme Sol de Beauclair, whose 1781 pastel by Liotard ([J.49.12631](#)) was acquired by the Louvre in 2022.

Isn’t it more probable that the great-niece in *Le Déjeuner* was the child of Mme Delessert, who lived to 1749? None of the investigations to date has looked beyond Jeanne’s burial entry:

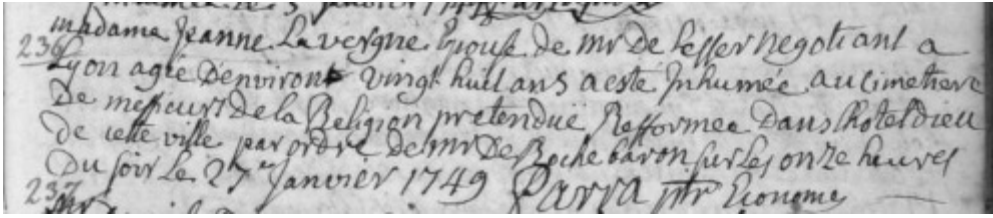
²¹ A David Clarenc from Puylaurens, son of Daniel and Antoinette Malabiou and uncle of this most likely Daniel Clarenc, was a theology student at the University of Geneva from 1709 to 1712 (where he may have known François Lavergne); he was a pastor in Jutschen and then Bernau, Prussia, where he died in 1749: see Camille Rabaud, *Histoire du protestantisme dans l’Albigeois et le Lauraguais*, 1898, p. 80; Patric Ferté & Caroline Barrera, *Étudiants de l’exil...*, Toulouse, 2009, p. 68; Suzanne Stelling-Michaud, *Le Livre du recteur de l’Académie de Genève*, 1966, i, p. 515.

²² The identification of this homonym (the only one of a credible age) is supported also by the entry in the Puylaurens burial register in 1781, where his forename is entered as Pierre before being corrected to Daniel. He may well have been known by this name to distinguish him from his father and grandfather, both Daniel.

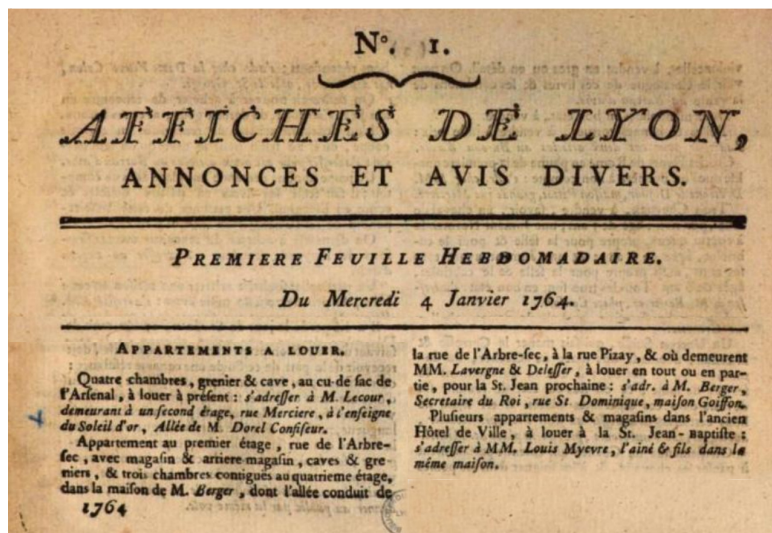
²³ Archives du Tarn, 17.VII.1766. This identification added in the 7.XII.2022 update of this essay.

²⁴ In the invaluable *La Banque protestante en France*, 1961, ii, p. 514, n.64.

²⁵ He was alive at the time of Pierre’s marriage in 1770, and as argued in a previous note was almost certainly the Daniel Clarenc who died in 1781.



nor will the answer be found in online genealogy searches. But from an old volume of the *Annuaire de noblesse* (1907), I was able to find more about this side of the family (see [here](#) for my genealogy; all the online genealogies follow d’Hozier in reporting this branch of the family as extinct, and list no children to François’s father). François Delessert (1721–1752), from Cossonay, was a négociant à Lyon and a cousin of Étienne Delessert (1735–1816), much better known later as a banker in Paris with an extended family of financiers including a pair de France.²⁶ (As an indication of how small the Protestant world then was, I note that another of François Delessert’s Lyon cousins, Paul-Benjamin Delessert, was married to Marie-Anne-Suzanne Massé, great-niece of Liotard’s master²⁷ in Paris.) Étienne and Paul-Benjamin’s father, François’s uncle, was Benjamin Delessert (1690–1765), himself a négociant à Lyon, having been a bourgeois de Genève in 1724. Two years after François’s death in Lyon in 1752, at the age of 20, it was the brilliant Étienne who was selected to head the family firm (it was not until 1777 that he resettled in Paris). A 1764 notice, hitherto overlooked, establishes that there was an even closer connection between the Lavergne and Delessert families than Jeanne’s marriage: “MM. Lavergne & Delessert” lived together at rue de l’Arbre-Sec:²⁸



We know that François and Jeanne had a daughter Anne – Jeanne died giving birth to her. Thus Anne was an orphan by 1754, was five years old then, and might well have been adopted by one of her aunts.

One of the mysteries about Le Déjeuner Lavergne is why Liotard interrupted his successful stay in London to dash back to Lyon for a short period. One plausible (if unprovable) explanation might be a family conference after the recent deaths of François Lavergne and of François

²⁶ A pastel of Étienne Delessert [J.9.1472](#) appeared on the art market in 2006. Although of disappointing quality, I considered that it had definite echoes of some of Liotard’s more awkward portraits, and suggested it might be a copy of a lost work by him. Marcel Roethlisberger however disagreed (private communications 2006), and the work is in the Dictionary among the anonymous French school.

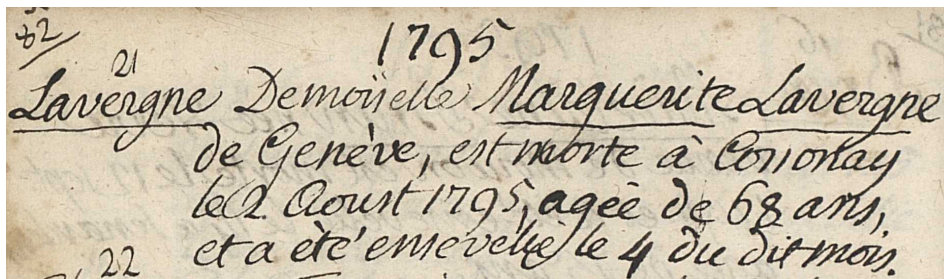
²⁷ As I’ve pointed out before, the contractual arrangement was not one of *apprentissage* but of *allouage*. Liotard never had a conventional French training.

²⁸ In a notice in the *Affiches de Lyon* on 4.1.1764 advertising retail space to be let “dans la maison de M. Berger, dont l’allée conduit de la rue de l’Arbre-sec, à la rue Pizay, & où demeurent MM. Lavergne & Delessert.” [Note added in 2023.]

Delesert, including perhaps decisions to be made on the little girl's guardianship as well as on Étienne Delessert's promotion.

Anne married a pastor from a family of notaries in Cossonay, where the Delesserts retained their connections; she died there on 15 May 1802.²⁹ Her husband was Louis-Samuel Gleyre (1751–1815): born in Cossonay, he studied theology at Lausanne and qualified as a pastor in 1775, but he was inactive in the ministry. In 1777 he became a member of the *église wallonne* in Amsterdam and from about 1778 to 1783 he was a private teacher of Hendrik (1765–1838) and Jacob (1766–1835) Fagel, grandsons of Hendrik Fagel (1706–1790), griffier van de Staten-Generaal in The Hague – and of course well known to Liotard (his portrait of their aunt is [J.49.1442](#)). Gleyre's correspondence with the boys and their grandfather is in the Nationaal archief, The Hague, familie Fagel. Gleyre returned to Cossonay in 1783, and there, two years later, he married Anne (who was already 36): they had no children. During the Revolution of 1798, Gleyre became an inspecteur des écoles, and completed his career as juge de paix du cercle de Cossonay.

So I think the best view is that the little girl in *Le Déjeuner* is the orphaned niece, Anne Delessert (1749–1802), future Mme Louis Gleyre. And although this strays into speculation, we can also suggest that, of the three sisters Catherine, Marguerite or Andrienne Lavergne already suggested, the other sitter might be Anne's favourite aunt Marguerite: for she went to live with Anne in Cossonay, where she died, aged 68, in 1795 (a document discovered only in 2023):



For a little more about Liotard's cousins beyond the bare genealogical data and the information³⁰ about Lavergne frères discussed in my [essay](#) on the pendant, some insight may be gleaned from the testimony of the Genevan Jean-Jacques Juventin (1741–1810), later pasteur at Chêne but who embarked on a tour of France, The Netherlands and England in 1764. Juventin's cousin Antoinette Deleuze married Liotard's nephew Jean-Pierre Liotard (1711–1765); he was the Liotard referred to in one of Juventin's letters home (to his uncle and aunt, who had adopted him after he was orphaned) expressing concern about his health. Juventin had been given an introduction to the Lavergne family for his passage through Lyon, and reported back to his uncle (from Lyon, 22 October 1764):

J'ai mangé chez la famille Lavergne qui m'a reçu à bras ouverts sans compliments et sans cérémonies, j'y vais avec familiarité, j'y suis reçu avec empressement, je ne reçois plus de leur part d'invitations parce que la première a fait pour toutes les autres, en vérité les plaisirs que l'on goûte dans la société d'une famille si unie, si gaie, si complaisante, ont en réalité ce qu'ils n'ont pas en bruit et en éclat.

From Paris, 6 November 1764, he wrote in more detail to his aunt:

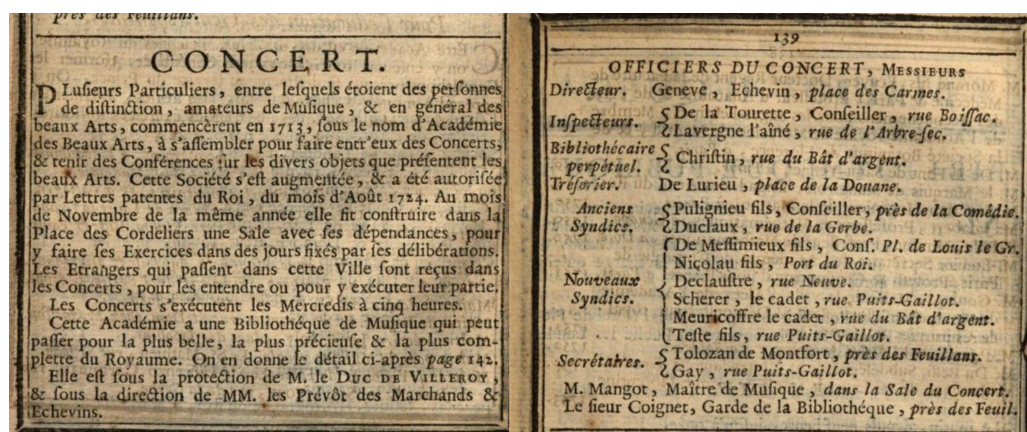
²⁹ Further to the undated reference in the 1907 *Annuaire*, and after this note was first posted, I was able to obtain a copy of the entry in Gaston de Lessert, *Famille de Lessert: souvenirs et portraits*, 1904 (my thanks to Étienne Burgy, conservateur at the Bibliothèque de Genève: no copy is known outside Switzerland), which provides us with Anne's dates (I have made some consequential amendments to the text above). (I am grateful to Ramona Fritschi at BCU Lausanne for consulting an unpublished list of pasteurs at Cossonay by Henri Vuilleumier in which Gleyre's name does not appear, suggesting that he did pursue a different career.) It is also possible that he was the Louis Gleyre who published *French miscellanies*, a language tutor, in Dublin in 1785. The painter Charles Gleyre (1806–1874) may well have been connected, but was not a direct descendant. In October 2019 my attention has been drawn by Kees van Strien to more information on Gleyre, now incorporated above.

³⁰ One avenue not explored here or in my other essay is the Lavergne connections with Liotard's other sitters: for example, a 1761 procuration de rente publique (AN MC/ET/CVIII/543) shows the Lavergne firm acting with Anne de Molènes, Mme Jean-Baptiste Guiramand, a cousin of Mme Tronchin.

Dans le fracas de Lyon je savourais encore les délices de Genève, j'y vis des après dîner, des sociétés qui me retracèrent celles de ma patrie, j'assistais à quelques-unes toujours conduit par les Demoiselles Lavergne et comment aurais-je pu m'en défendre! Elles en faisaient le principal ornement! Et je m'érigeais ensuite en juge, juge dites-vous ! oui, juge je comparais mes compatriotes avec les Dames Françaises et voici ce que j'ai trouvé, pardon sexe enchanteur qui avez des droits sur mon cœur et sur ma reconnaissance, si un faible individu ose porter des regards sur vos faiblesses et apprécier des qualités qui ne purent jamais l'être, les Genevoises sont plus instruites mais les autres sont plus gracieuses, l'esprit combat pour nous et la bonté, la douceur, la complaisance nous disputent la palme, vous plaisez plus à mes compatriotes au chercheur d'esprit et de saillies dans les premiers instants de la conversation mais en France, on plaît davantage par l'affabilité, l'empressement, la sincérité, la bonhomie, les unes attirent par l'esprit et les autres par le cœur, je pourrais continuer encore ce parallèle, montrer comment nos Dames pourraient gagner du côté de la société sans perdre du côté de la conversation, pourquoi celles de France sont moins estimées et plus aimées sans doute, mais j'attends une connaissance plus exacte, une fréquentation plus assidue, je les verrai en homme désintéressé, je prendrai la balance ensuite et j'annoncerai ma décision, pardon encore une fois si j'ose prononcer mais il ne faut pas voyager en étourdi, il faut porter des regards curieux sur tout ce qui peut intéresser et qui a plus de charmes que vous, aimable moitié du genre humain!

Juventin's letters during his European tour were made available online recently on a family genealogy website.

One detail in the Déjeuner Lavergne has so far escaped attention: Liotard has meticulously applied his signature to a sheet of music (in both versions). No notes are legible; but it is perhaps worth noting that in the *Almanach civil, politique et littéraire de Lyon* for 1754 (p. 138f), under the heading Concert, there is an account of the Académie des beaux-arts established in 1713 for the purposes of holding concerts (every Wednesday) and lectures concerning the fine arts (although music seems to have been the main focus); it also housed a music library, claimed to be the most complete in the realm. The two inspectors were [Claret] de La Tourette (another Liotard sitter from the 1754 visit, [J.49.1264](#)) and Lavergne l'aîné, rue de l'Arbre-sec (Jean Lavergne, the eldest of the brothers, discussed in more detail in my essay on *L'Écriture*):



It is clear that Liotard himself remained in touch with the family, and probably stayed with them during his 1770 trip to Lyon (and in his later visits). It was then that he made a pastel of the Lyon surgeon Pierre-Nicolas Grassot, who wrote to the artist seven years later (17.VI.1777) to complain about its condition, notably falling pastel, which he had reported to Liotard's nieces, who assured him that their uncle would put it right and encouraged him to write the letter which is all that survives of this portrait.

Various almanachs provide the address of the firm of Frères Lavergne & Fils as rue de l'Arbre-Sec, in the Le Platre quarter of Lyon. That is the address given in our earliest record for the Lavergne family in Lyon, the baptismal entry for Marianne in 1734. It is the address given in the 1764 property notice reproduced above. On 8.VIII.1787, "Les Demoiselles Lavergne sœurs" subscribed 150 livres for a *Souscription proposée par les syndics-jurés-gardes de la communauté de la*

Fabriques des etoffs d'or, argent & soie de la Ville de Lyon, en faveur des Ouvriers privés de travail. In 1788 the eldest sister Anne died, her burial entry indicating that she lived at rue Pizay – the street parallel to the rue de l'Arbre-Sec and connected to it by the alley mentioned in the 1764 property notice reproduced above. The rue de l'Arbre-sec address again appears for the “Demoiselles Lavergne”, listed as donors (of 84 livres) to the Société philanthropique, ou de Bienfaisance chrétienne, in 1789 (*Liste des souscripteurs*, p. 19), the level of the subscription indicating that just two sisters remained, Marianne and Marguerite. Of the 11 siblings, the two girls who married both died in their twenties, while the three boys all died unmarried, Jacques-Antoine's suicide in 1781 bringing the male line to an end.

Neil Jeffares

Addendum - Note on the frame



In a [Tweet](#) of 6 January 2019, Peter Schade wrote that “the frame of the newly loaned Liotard pastel ... looks very promising from a distance, but it is too rough to be English mid 18th century- it has to be late 19th or early 20th century.” It is certainly possible that the frame (or possibly just the glass) was changed immediately after the 1916 sale, as the brown tape on the back (nearly completely) covers the auctioneer’s stencil mark, 395CL, for that sale on the back of the strainer.

In October 2022, the pastel was reframed, in a cut-down French pastel frame with gilding toned down from a much redder hue which would have competed with the pastel’s tonality.



Although this type of frame was widely used by French pastellists at the time, it seems unlikely that this pastel would ever have been framed thus. It left Lyon shortly after it was finished, probably in a simple temporary frame, and Duncannon is likely to have had it reframed in London, most likely in an English rocaille frame not unlike the later version now replaced. A further unfortunate effect of the deep ogee moulding is to make the figures recede still further.