

## Mme veuve Perronneau's second marriage<sup>1</sup>

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IF YOU SHARE MY INTEREST in Perronneau's work, and have been driven to read his few surviving letters to glean more of his personality – or better still, have read the monumental and immensely thorough monograph by Dominique d'Arnoult which came out at the end of 2014, you will perhaps have wondered about his poor wife, née Louise-Charlotte Aubert (1741–1817). His long absences and her frequent illnesses will be familiar – although perhaps the



former precluded the frequent pregnancies that most married women of this period will have endured. In fact we know only of three children: Jeanne-Sophie, born in 1756 and died soon after; Alexandre-Joseph-Urbain (1766–1831) and Henri-Louis (1773–1812). You will also know that Louise-Charlotte was much younger than the pastellist: a mere 13 when they married (he was it seems 38), and only 42 when he died. (Her age is also a little uncertain, inferred from that given in the *partage des biens* of her father; while the age given on her death certificate in 1817 suggests she could have been a couple of years older. That however is difficult in view of her parents' marriage.) So it is no great surprise that she remarried, or that her second husband was a painter – one Jean-Baptiste-Claude Robin (1734–1818), who d'Arnoult suggests may have been Perronneau's pupil for portraiture, and who she argues justly was closely connected with the family. Personally I can't say I warm greatly to Robin, either in his

painting (which seems to me to show little influence from Perronneau) or his art criticism (which feels rather pompous, as you might expect from a censeur royal); but I hope he was nicer in person.

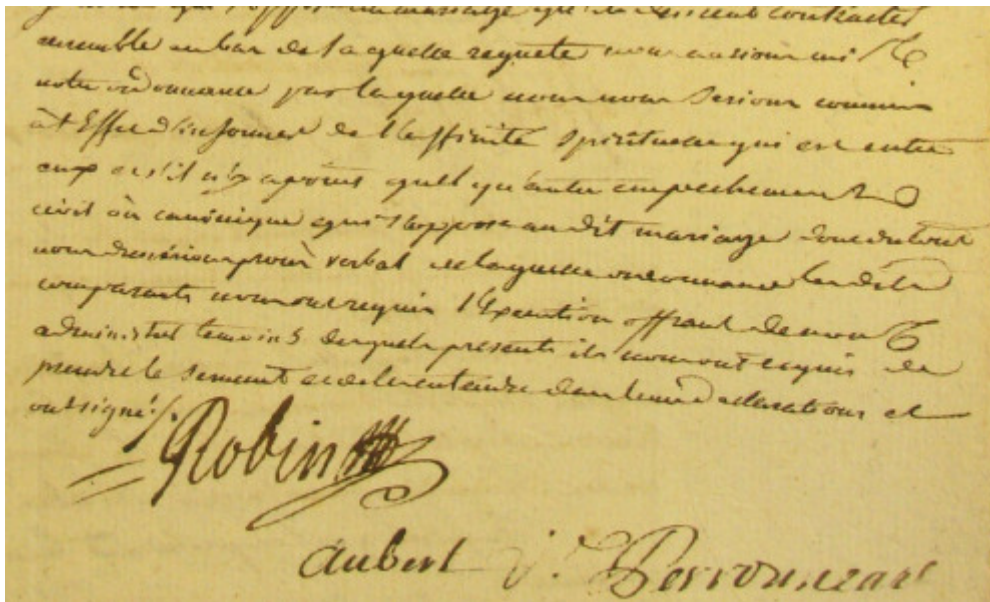
But when did this happen? An old study on Robin, by Charles Marionneau (1894), states that the marriage took place in 1796, when Robin had retired to his château at La Pigeonnière, Chailles (near Blois), although a quick perusal of the parish records does not confirm this. Indeed d'Arnoult cites what seems to be a complete rebuttal: the marriage contract, executed in Paris on 13 février 1784 (AN MC CXIX/474); and other documents seem to confirm they were married then.

But this is not the whole story. In among the files of Dispenses de consanguinité (to which I have already [alluded](#)) is a curious, and rather sad, document suggesting that they were stopped at the altar. For the very next day after the marriage contract, they appeared before church officials

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<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared on my blog, [neiljeffares.wordpress.com](http://neiljeffares.wordpress.com), on 9 September 2016. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, "Mme veuve Perronneau's second marriage", *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/MmePerronneau2ndMarriage.pdf>.

to obtain a dispensation they had obviously overlooked (and one I confess in my ignorance of Catholic doctrine I too didn't realise was required): a dispense d'Affinité spirituelle.



You can find my (rather imperfect) transcription of this document (whose legibility you can assess from the snippet above with the parties' signatures) in my chronological [table](#) of documents relating to Perronneau (pp. 14f; it is AN Z<sup>10</sup> 183). It is as with so many such documents couched in formulaic, repetitive terms, and involves each of Robin, Louise-Charlotte and their witnesses being interrogated by the Vicar General, a doctor of theology from the Sorbonne, in a catechism to which their answers have clearly been rehearsed. But the essential facts are easily summarised.

The impediment arose because Robin had acted as godfather to one of the Perronneau children (confirming d'Arnoult's suspicion of a close family relationship). We aren't told when, but as the child was a boy we can assume it was called at least one of Jean-Baptiste or Claude: and as neither of the recorded children bears this name, this must have been a different, hitherto unknown birth. Such a relationship amounted to a "spiritual affinity" that barred marriage without dispensation.

The proper form of dispensation was to send to Rome, but this had several disadvantages which had carefully to be presented to the Vicar General to allow the matter to be considered instead by the Archbishop of Paris. First, the costs of going to Rome were obviously substantial: the parties accordingly pleaded poverty, each stating that "ils sont pauvres ne vivant que de leur travail et industrie et hors d'état de faire les frais." Was this strictly correct, in view of the information d'Arnoult has uncovered on the unexpectedly large estate that Perronneau left?

Secondly, and trickier: the urgency and need to get married (often with other dispensation cases this involved pregnancy). Here the argument was that "ils se sont promis la foi de mariage et qu'ils se recherchent et fréquentent dans cette vue depuis deux mois environ en sorte que si leur mariage ne pouvoit être célébré il pourroit s'élever des bruits nuisibles à leur réputation." (A curiosity here is how they each responded to the question of their residence: for Louise Charlotte, this was "à Paris rue des Bernardins paroisse de St Nicolas du Chardonnet", while Robin answered "à Paris cloître des Bernardins paroisse &c.": was this the same house, which they seem to have bought outright the following year, from the daughter of the marquis du Breuil – see the document cited on p.15 of my table?)

A further argument they deployed was based on the two young children Louise-Charlotte had to bring up on her own “auxquels elle ne pouvait donner l’éducation convenable pour les faire réussir au mettier de peinture dans lequel s’est distingué leur pere et que led. suppliant professe”: so she was determined that both should become painters. (One did; the other became a printer. Did his step-father influence this?)

There followed the usual formula concerning any other impediments; had the man “forced or seduced” the woman’s consent; and did they both profess the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion (here the clerk’s abbreviations become so perfunctory that one detects a whiff of Gallicanism).

As so often with these documents, it is the witnesses who can tell us so much more about the social standing of the parties than the stereotyped formulae. One imagines they were there for a wedding. Chief among them (and leading the oath) was Robin’s brother, Joseph-Pierre, a priest and curate of Cingieux who had travelled up for the event: was he the objector? The others were all humble: a bourgeois de Paris; a tourneur-machiniste and a maître cordonnier.

Was the dispensation forthcoming? Did the church wedding take place immediately, or was Marrionneau right after all? Were there any damaging rumours?

I don’t know. It probably doesn’t matter to us; but I suspect it mattered to Louise-Charlotte, whose portrait above you will remember was “[mislaid](#)” by her first husband in Orléans in 1766.

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