

Nattier, René-Charles de Maupeou

NEIL JEFFARES



[Jean-Marc Nattier](#)

René-Charles de MAUPEOU

[Zoomify](#)

Pastel on blue-grey paper, 60.3x51.0 cm

c.1744

Private collection

PROVENANCE: the artist; his sale, Paris, 27 June 1763, Lot 5 (“Un [portrait], M. le Président de M*** en pastel, bordure dorée & glace”), 37 livres, to Mr...; abbé François-Emmanuel Pommyer (1713–1784); his nephew, Yves-Joseph-Charles Pommyer de Rougemont (?–1788), directeur des fermes du roi; his daughter, Mme Louis Theurier, née Geneviève Pommyer (1774–1832); her son, Charles Theurier-Pommyer (1800–1876); his widow, née Anne-Pierrette de La Huproye (1807–1883), marquise romaine; legs: baron Clément de Jacquier de Rosée (1835–1905), château de Moulins-Warnant, par Yvoir-sur-Meuse; son fils baron Alfred de Jacquier de Rosée (1871–1935), château de Schaltin, Namur, Belgium (the great-grandson of baronne Antoine-Laurent de Jacquier de Rosée, née Elisabeth d’Incourt de Fréchencourt, the daughter of the Pommyer’s niece and sister of Jacques-Jean-Baptiste-Simon, comtesse Pierre d’Incourt de Fréchencourt, née Marie-Françoise Pommyer de Rougemont); his widow, née

Louise Anne-Marie Daly (1885–1967); their nephew, baron Emmanuel de Jacquier de Rosée (1906–1987); London, Christie’s, 10 December 1993, Lot 51 (as “portrait of a member of a Court of Justice”, “Circle of Maurice-Quentin de La Tour”; reproduced)

EXHIBITIONS: Salon de 1748, no. 47 (“Le Portrait en Pastel de M. de Maupeou, Premier Président”)

LITERATURE: Anon. [baron Louis-Guillaume Baillet de Saint-Julien], *Réflexions sur quelques circonstances présentes contenant deux lettres sur l'exposition des tableaux au Louvre cette année 1748, à M. le comte de R***, et une lettre à Voltaire au sujet de sa tragédie de “Sémiramis”*, s.l., 1748, p. 18; Émile Bellier de la Chavignerie & Louis Auvray, *Dictionnaire général des artistes de l'école française depuis l'origine des arts du dessin jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, 1882, t. 2, p. 152; François Bluche, *Les magistrats du parlement de Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1986, p. 289; Anon. [l'abbé Louis Gougenot], *Lettre sur la peinture, la sculpture et l'architecture à M****, seconde édition, revue et augmentée, Amsterdam, 1749, p. 117; Georges Huard, “Nattier”, in Louis Dimier, *Les peintres français du XVIII^e siècle*, 1930, II, p. 132 (“ouvrages absents...”, no. 8); Anon. [Charles Léoffroy de Saint-Yves], *Observations sur les arts, et sur quelques morceaux de Peinture et de sculpture, exposés au Louvre en 1748*, Leyden, 1748, p. 92; Pierre de Nolhac, *Nattier, peintre de la cour de Louis XV*, Paris, 1905, pp. 107, 157; reprint, 1910, pp. 172, 250; Paul Ratouis de Limay, *Le Pastel en France au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1946, p. 24; Colin T. Eisler & al., *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress collection: European schools*, Oxford, 1977, p. 310; Philippe Renard, *Jean-Marc Nattier*, Saint-Rémy-en-l’Eau, 1999, pp. 177, 215, 217, 220; Xavier Salmon, “Jean-Marc Nattier, pastelliste”, in *L’Objet d’art*, November 1999, pp. 34–41, reproduced, colour, figs. 1 and 4; Xavier Salmon, *Jean-Marc Nattier 1685–1766*, exhibition catalogue, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, 26 October 1999 – 30 January 2000, p. 173, reproduced, fig. 3; Neil Jeffares, “L’abbé Pommyer, honoraire amateur de l’Académie royale de peinture”, in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, May–June 2001, pp. 237–256, reproduced, colour, fig. 4; Neil Jeffares, “A l’ombre de La Tour : quelques pastellistes des deux académies”, conférence, Colloque La Tour, Saint-Quentin, 22 October 2004; Jeffares 2006, p. 389, reproduced; Perronneau 2017, fig. 40c; Jeffares 2017s, fig. 5; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, J.554.169

RELATED WORKS: (A) *Le Portrait de M. de Maupeou, Premier Président du Parlement de Paris*, toile de quatre pieds de haut sur trois pieds de large, [128x96], presumably oil on canvas, by Jean Chevalier, Salon de l’Académie de Saint-Luc, 1753, no. 114 (lost); (B) pastel, by Jean Chevalier, not signed, not dated, 61x51 cm, in later Louis XV style frame with “Le Chevallier” label attached to front; recent backing (Neuilly, comte Gérard de Maupeou, in 1999; with Maupeou family from 1908). Exh.: *Exposition de Cent*

Pastels, 1908, no. 8; *Le siècle de Louis XV*, 1934, no. 50, not reproduced in either catalogue. (C) amateur oil copy of (B), by Mme Caroline de Maupeou (Château de Guermantes, family collection). (D) engraving, in reverse, by Gilles-Edmé Petit; in oval, with chair (on socle: “René-Charles de Maupeou, Vicomte de Bruyeres;/Marquis de Morangles,/Seigneur de Noisy, Montigny sur Aube/ et autres Lieux, Chevalier Conseiller du Roi en tous ses Conseils/Premier Président de son Parlement.”//“L’Equité, la Candeur, l’amour de la Patrie,/De son âme élevée augustes attributs,/Ont gravé dans nos Cœurs son Image Chérie,/Et consacrent ses faits au Temple des Vertus./N le Roy”; below the line, “Peint par J. Chevalier en 1745./Gravé par Petit rue St Jacques près les Mathurins/1753”). Lit.: Portalis & Béraldi 16 (“Maupeou, premier président au Parlement, peint par Chevalier en 1745, gravé en 1753; in-4.”); Le Blanc 62 (“Maupeou (René-Charles de), premier président au Parlement, dans un cadre ovale: J. Chevalier. 1753. In-fol.”); John Rogister, *Louis XV and the Parlement of Paris, 1737–1755*, Cambridge, 1995, reproduced, pl. 4; Adolphe Watinne, *Magistrats célèbres du XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1941, reproduced opp. p. 186. (E) engraving, also in reverse, by Gilles-Edmé Petit; in oval, with chair, reduced version of (D) (“René-Charles de Maupeou./Vicomte de Bruyeres, Marquis de Morangles,/Seign^r de Noisy, Montigny sur Aube et autres Lieux/Chevalier Conseiller du Roi en tous ses Conseils./Premier Président de son Parlement.” on shield; “Présenté à Monseigneur, par son très humble serviteur le Roy, Greffier au Criminal.” “Prudent, Juste, Pieux, à son devoir fidèle,/Ce Prince du Sénat, en tout tems en tout lieu,/Soutint, avec l’ardeur qu’inspire le vrai zèle,/La cause de son Roy, de la France et de Dieu./Nicolas le Roy.”; below the line, “Petit, rue St Jacques près les Mathurins.”) (F) engraving, in direct sense (i.e. same as pastel), by Basset, for Dreux du Radier, *L’Europe illustre*, 1777, t. 4 (“J. Chevalier pinxit/Basset sculp.” “RENE CHARLES DE MAUPOU/Vicomte de Bruyeres; Marquis de Morangles,/Seigneur de Noisy Montigny sur Aube et autres lieux./Chevalier Conseiller du Roi en tous ses Conseils premier/President de son Parlement.” on socle; below “Suite d’Odieuvre Cul de Sac de Vignes.”)

ICONOGRAPHY: (I) marble bust by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, signed and dated 1768, H 87 cm, Salon de 1769 (Musée Jacquemart-André; acquired Clavel d’Eyland, Paris 1891). Lit.: sketched by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin on p. 32 of *Salon livret*; Michael Levy, *Painting and sculpture in France 1700–1789*, New Haven 1993, p. 92, reproduced; Louis Réau, *Les Lemoyne*, Paris, 1927, no. 96, reproduced; (II) portrait by Van Loo (château de Guermantes)¹

GENEALOGY: [Maupeou](#)

IN THE SALON OF 1748, the year of his famous portrait of Marie Leszczyńska, Nattier also exhibited the portrait of the premier président de Maupeou (one of only two pastels that he exhibited there throughout his career, according to the livrets²). The contemporary critic l’abbé Gougenot wrote “M. Nattier par la douceur de son pinceau mérite à juste titre d’être le Peintre du beau sexe. Il continue toujours d’être également goûté & de la Cour & du Public. Le portrait qu’il a fait au Pastel de M. le Premier Président de Meaupeou, a eu plus de partisans que ses Tableaux à l’huile. Ce dernier genre est sans doute plus difficile, puisqu’on y réussit moins communément.”³ Saint-Yves concurred, comparing the colouring with the portrait of the actress Caroline (omitted from the Salon livret): “La tête au pastel (N^o. 47.) de M. de Meaupou, d’un meilleur ton, a de la vigueur.” Baillet de Saint-Julien included it in his second letter, most of which he devoted to one of La Tour’s great masterpieces, the portrait of Dumont le Romain, following which “M. Nattier, a donné celui de M. le Premier Président, [en Pastel] qui est un morceau de remarque, mais qui le seroit bien plus sans l’autre.” Long lost from view, it reemerged in time for Xavier Salmon, in his article on the pastels of Nattier (1999), to include it: “l’effigie de Nattier est une œuvre de belle intensité psychologique et de grande qualité technique.”

The sitter is shown in the robes of a président au parlement, en tenue de cérémonie – largely unchanged since the formal regulation of 1602, as seen in portraits a hundred years earlier such as those of Philippe de Champaigne (*Jean-Antoine de Mesme*, Louvre M.I. 912) and Nanteuil (an example in pastel is *Guillaume de Lamoignon*, musée Carnavalet) – the scarlet manteau (the royal colour symbolises that the président is the



Figure 1

¹ A miniature in the Walters sale (New York, Parke Bernet, 23–26 April 1941, Lot 578 reproduced, 8 cm round), supposedly of Le conseiller Maupeou, by François Hubert Drouais, is in fact a reduction of Largillière’s portrait of Hugues Desnotz in the Louvre; the miniature is not by Drouais but by Dulieu de Chenevoux; I am grateful to Bodo Hofstetter for resolving this confusion. It is correctly catalogued in the London, Christie’s, 27–28 November 2012 sale catalogue (Lot 437).

² The pastel of Logerot was exhibited in 1746. A pastel of “la fille d’un maître à danser” was shown in the Salon de 1745 but omitted from the livret; it was possibly the portrait of the actress known as Coraline; medium unknown, shown in 1748.

³ The third and fourth sentences are found only in the revised second edition of his work; cited, inaccurately, in Ratouis de Limay.

representative of the king) lined with ermine (the white winter pelt of the ermine is more precisely called *miniver*), showing around the opening (originally on the right side, betraying the military origins of the garment, but moved to the centre); the *épitoge*, alternating stripes of ermine (with black tails) and grey squirrel fur, hanging over the left shoulder; and the hood, closed to the neck, variously referred to as a *chaperon fourré*, a *camail*, or *capa magna*, of white ermine (without black spots) folded back on the left side. He wears a wig but no cap is shown; nor is the *saïe* or cassock, worn underneath the *manteau*.⁴

The image is built up on light blue-grey paper, with long loose fibres; the background is an extremely dark green, with carefully graded light to the right of the sitter's head (although the light source is from the left). The pose is distinctive of Nattier – another example in pastel being the *princesse de Beauvau* (1746). The image is produced by modelling the colours; almost no chalk strokes are visible. The face enjoys a very warm tonality, while the eyes achieve a remarkable three-dimensional liquidity: in addition to the conventional white dot on the top right of each eyeball, a longer white stroke catches the light from the meniscus of fluid at the edge of the lower lid. A red stroke marks the edge of the wig against the forehead, and the hairs of the wig are individually picked out against a black background in a manner typical of the artist's pastels. Over the fur hood, the artist has feathered light blue-grey chalk (indicating only that the ermine is relatively recent, as it yellows with age), and some of the pigment (perhaps minute traces of gouache, or possibly pastel applied with water as a vehicle) has been applied with a brush, the strokes of which are just visible. An interesting technical comparison is offered by Nattier's pastel portrait of Pierre Grassin (*hôtel de la Monnaie*), signed and dated 1743; the subject is shown in similar robes to Maupeou, but the hood is entirely in white and shades of grey.

At the 1748 Salon, it would surely have been evident that this portrait of Maupeou reflects the same tonality as the portrait of the Queen: the warm face against the deep green background, the red gown below, and the colour of the white lace and texture of the fur trimmings replacing the judge's hood. The baroque sweep of the folded-back collar also echoes Rigaud portraits such as those of cardinals Fleury and Dubois. Salmon (1999–2000) comments on the strong contrast of the red and black found in this and other portraits of the noblesse de robe.

The early description by Gabriel-Henri Gaillard⁵ emphasised that Maupeou père was showered by Nature with all possible external advantages, “d'une taille noble et majestueuse, d'une figure superbe”, while his infamous son was small and ugly. In fact however considerable physical similarities emerge from comparing their portraits (although their characters did differ markedly). The father is best known from the bust by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, 1768 (Salon de 1769; musée Jacquemart-André, fig. 1), praised for its accuracy by Diderot (the *Mercur de France* noted “la parfaite ressemblance”, while the author of the *Mémoires secrets* remarked on the nobility of the subject).



Figure 2

The iconography of Maupeou *le fils* includes a portrait variously attributed to Lacour and Taillasson (Versailles, MV 4405; fig. 2); a possibly related drawing,⁶ signed apparently by Lemoyne and dated 1771; among several prints is a colour engraving by Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier-Dagoty (*Inventaire*

⁴ Private communication, Christopher Allen, of Ede & Ravenscroft, January 1999; Madeleine Nicolas & Madeleine Delpierre, *Uniformes civils français...1750–1980*, musée de la Mode et du Costume, Paris, Palais Galliera, December 1982 – April 1983; W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A history of legal dress in Europe*, Oxford, 1963.

⁵ *Vie ou éloge historique de Malesherbes*, Paris, 1805, p. 19.

⁶ Apparently by the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne and with the comte de Maupeou (Jeffares, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, February 1999, no. 214; on the basis of this portrait and its supposed authorship the family at one stage believed that the Jacquemart-André bust must be of Maupeou *le fils*).

du fonds français, 89), and an engraving (1772) by François Hubert.⁷

Comparing these, one notes the same extraordinary eyebrows, which tend to dominate the face; the long nose is also similar. However, the father has a smaller mouth and shorter face; he also has a tumour on his right cheek clearly evident both in the Lemoyne bust and the Nattier. Their colouring was also presumably different in view of the son's nickname of "la bigarrade"; according to Sénac de Meilhan, he had "une figure de Juif, un teint olivâtre, des manières de pantalon, un regard faux et perfide".

A series of repetitions made by the obscure portraitist Jean Chevalier (see cat. [3]) included a lost oil painting and a pastel replica (fig. 3).⁸ The latter was included in two Paris exhibitions – the 1908 *Exposition de cent pastels* and the 1934 *Siècle de Louis XV*; in both cases, as in the Maupeou family collection; it remains in a private collection in France. The work is close to the Nattier, but the latter is evidently the primary image, in terms of both quality and detail; what in Nattier is softness becomes vagueness in the replica. Chevalier uses much the same approach as Nattier in blending colours, but there is less care in the wig, and the robes are less well defined. The face in particular is simplified.

Chevalier's work was engraved by Gaillard, Aveline, Petit and Wille; a portrait of Louis XV engraved by Wille "d'après Ch. Parrocel et J. Chevalier" indicates that Chevalier collaborated with more important artists. It was Gilles-Edmé Petit⁹ who engraved the portrait of Maupeou (in reverse) in 1753,¹⁰ the caption recording Chevalier (rather than Nattier) as the author of the original: "Peint par J. Chevalier en 1745./Gravé par Petit rue S^t Jacques près les Mathurins/1753". It and a reduced version were published by Petit for a certain Nicolas Le Roy, greffier-commis au greffe criminel du parlement de Paris.¹¹

The relationship between the several versions of this portrait can be illuminated by an unusual feature. The Nattier pastel depicts on the sitter's right cheek a small tumour or haemangioma (possibly a symptom of Sturge-Weber syndrome¹²); it is found also on the bust by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, 1768 (fig. 1). While Nattier dealt with the problem with his usual discretion, Lemoyne's accuracy in depicting the asymmetric nasolabial folds is concealed by turning the head of the bust to the left. The tumour is completely absent from the Chevalier pastel. However, it reappears on the engravings: perhaps because the sitter was unhappy at the omission of so characteristic a feature, or possibly because it had grown in size by 1753. Significantly, the feature has been added to the Petit engraving on the same side as it would appear looking at the sitter, which, since the image is inverted, is inconsistent. This indicates that the correction was added by the engraver, directly to the plate, and is not due to Chevalier.

The date of the Chevalier copy of 1745 places a *terminus ante quem* (several years before the Salon of 1748) for the original work. As Nattier's other pastels were all made between 1743 and 1753, it seems likely that the picture was commissioned to mark Maupeou's promotion to premier président, i.e. soon after the end of 1743. As the more minor artist, Chevalier was no

⁷ Versailles has a nineteenth century copy in oils by Jules de Caudin, MV 3879; the same image was engraved by Leclere for Gavard's *Versailles: Galerie historique*, 1838, XII, pl. 2726^{bis}.

⁸ Private communications, John Rogister, March, June and September 1999; comte Gérard de Maupeou, September 1999.

⁹ Petit is known to have worked for parlementaires such as Titon du Tillet, who commissioned him to engrave a portrait of the actress Marie Sallé in 1740; two years later, Petit was to transform the plate into a "Dame à la promenade" by the addition of a hat and some pearls (Sophie Raux & Gaëtane Maës, *Collection d'estampes de Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing*, 1988, p. 96ff). His engraving of La Tour's portrait of Marie-Josèphe de Saxe (Albert Besnard & Georges Wildenstein, *La Tour*, Paris, 1928, no. 319) is another plate where he has followed his source only in respect of the face.

¹⁰ The border is similar to that in René Gaillard's engraving of Chevalier's portrait of Christophe de Beaumont (Firmin-Didot 764) as well as to that of Petit's engraving of La Tour's portrait of the dauphin, also from the Salon de 1748 (Besnard & Wildenstein 288, reproduced).

¹¹ He is listed in the *Almanach royal* for several years, from 1753 to 1756, residing at rue du Poirier Saint Merry, but disappears by 1758; perhaps the engraving was connected with his preferment. John Rogister thinks he may have been Maupeou's private secretary; it is thought that Maupeou interceded on Le Roy's behalf for a pension. The Maupeou image appears to have been subsequently engraved (and reversed again) by Basset for Dreux du Radier's *L'Europe illustre* (1777).

¹² Private communications: Mr Charles Volkers FRCS, January 1999; Professor Stephen Porter, September 2000. Barbier reports that Maupeou suffered serious attacks of gout (for example in February 1744, he was confined to bed for two weeks).

doubt engaged to produce repetitions of Nattier's image, as this would have been much less expensive than ordering these from Nattier himself. It would also have been cheaper to order just the head from Nattier, and have the picture lengthened – and the chair added – by Chevalier. In fact, since the Nattier was included in the artist's studio sale in 1763, it seems clear that for whatever reason, Maupeou never acquired the original and could only have made the Chevalier copy available to engravers. In view of the Salon reviews, it seems most likely that this arose through an inability to pay or a dispute over price (which might account for the suppression of Nattier's name from the reproductions) rather than dissatisfaction over quality or resemblance, the most frequent grounds on which disputes for non-payment were heard at the Châtelet.¹³

René-Charles de Maupeou, marquis de Morangles, vicomte de Bruyères (1688–1775), avocat du roi au Châtelet 1707, conseiller au parlement de Paris 1710; maître des requêtes 1712, président à mortier 1717, premier président 1743–1757, vice-chancelier de France 1763–1768, chancelier de France 15–16 September 1768, was born into a family of clerics and lawyers; his father was a président aux enquêtes du parlement de Paris, and a cousin married chancelier Pontchartrain. He entered the profession young, as an avocat, rapidly rising to the position of



Figure 3

conseiller au parlement. On 29 March 1712, the marquis de Sourches¹⁴ records “Le chancelier [Louis Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain] présenta au roi Maupeou conseiller au parlement de Paris, son parent, qui étoit un jeune homme parfaitement bien fait, lequel alloit acheter une charge de maître des requêtes et épouser Mlle de Courson, petite fille de Basville, conseiller d’État et intendant en Languedoc.” On 19 April 1712, the king signed the marriage contract with Anne-Victoire de Lamoignon (1696–1767), daughter of Urbain-Guillaume Lamoignon de Courson, the intendant of Bordeaux and a member of another great political dynasty; and Maupeou acquired his position as maître des requêtes. Two months later, Maupeou's uncle, the archévêque d'Auch, died, leaving him an income of 35,000 livres.¹⁵ Within five years he had become a judge.

In October 1743, Maupeou was made premier président, a position he held for the next fourteen years. He was chosen over his rival Lamoignon de Blanc-Mesnil (a cousin of his wife) because of his better connections at court and his agreeable manners, despite suffering from severe gout. Maurepas wrote to Marville: “Je suis charmé que Paris ait applaudi à la nomination de M. de Maupeou.”¹⁶ Barbier described his candidature: “C'est un homme extrêmement gracieux, d'un belle extérieure, de l'esprit, et homme propre à avoir affaire à la Cour, mais il est mangé de goutte qui est une grande incommodité.”¹⁷ The October entry reports his success, and adds a portrait:

M. de Maupeou n'est pas riche, on ne lui donne que quarante mille livres de rentes. Madame sa mère, dont il est fils unique et qui est âgée, en a ving-cinq à trente; mais il lui faut deux cent mille livres pour payer le brevet de retenue et cent cinquante mille livres pour des meubles, equipages et vaisselle d'argent. Cette illustration, qui est è la vérité bien grande pour lui et pour sa famille, l'incommodera dans les commencements. Il a un grande avantage dans sa femme, fille de M. de Lamoignon de Courson. C'est une femme entendue, surtout de beaucoup de l'esprit, et d'un grand arrangement dans le détail de sa mission. C'est un trésor dans une place de représentation et de grande dépense.

Il a un fils qui va prendre possession de la place de président à mortier, dans laquelle il avoit été reçu

¹³ There are endless examples in Georges Wildenstein's fascinating *Rapports d'experts 1712–1791, procès-verbaux d'expertises d'œuvres d'art extraits du fonds du Châtelet*, Paris, 1921.

¹⁴ Louis-François du Bouchet, marquis de Sourches, *Mémoires sur le règne de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1885, XIII, pp. 339; 371.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 425.

¹⁶ Letter, 4 October 1743; *Lettres de M. de Marville, lieutenant général de police, au ministre Maurepas (1742–1747)*, Paris, 1896, I, p. 142.

¹⁷ *Journal de Barbier*, September 1743, Paris, 1885, III, p. 469.

latter, assuming that it was his mistress who had rejected him, threw one of his celebrated tantrums.

Although it was anticipated that lodging the premier président in Versailles would bring Maupeou closer to the influence of the court rather than the parlement, in fact he failed to take the King's side on a number of matters: he opposed a tax rise in March 1748, but his opposition was most significant in the battles between the Jansenist parlements and the Jesuit court, such as the Hôpital général affair, concerning the appointment of a new head, which dragged on for a number of years around 1750. As Voltaire observed, "Jamais plus petite affaire ne causa une plus grande émotion dans les esprits." Driven by his ambition to succeed d'Aguesseau as chancelier, exacerbated by financial difficulties, Maupeou tried to take the position of intermediary, but ending up with enemies on both sides (although he retained Mme de Pompadour's support even after the events of the 1750s; she was also a supporter of his second son, the chevalier de Maupeou, a soldier), and he saw his rival Lamoignon appointed chancelier in December 1750, as a reward for taking the archbishop's side in the affair. Throughout these debates with the court, Maupeou took brave positions "avec une dignité et un air de grandeur qui en imposent".²⁴

Continuing disputes with the parlements over their Jansenist tendencies (and objections to the billets de confessions introduced by the king's Jesuit faction to as a means of eradicating Jansenism) led to the exile of all but the grand'chambre in May 1753; Maupeou's reaction was not to conciliate, but to tell that body that he regarded its exemption as "an insult to our zeal", whereupon the government had no choice but to banish the grand'chambre itself, to Pontoise. Maupeou himself was ordered to Soissons²⁵ where d'Argenson²⁶ tells us that "[il] ne tient que mauvais table, étant sans argent et sans revenus. Il est à bout des prêts qu'on lui a fait pour soutenir son rôle." Views of the premier président were strongly polarised: when he appeared in the galerie at Versailles in August, d'Argenson²⁷ described him as having "la figure d'Apollon sur le Parnasse... On admire son rôle comme celui d'un très-grand magistrat." At the same time, d'Argenson reported the interrogation of a man who admitted trying to assassinate Maupeou at the instigation of his confessor. There were also attempts to suborn the premier président with the offer of the cordon bleu and a settlement of his debts.

While Maupeou's public response was confrontational, in private, however, during much of the period until the recall in September 1754, Maupeou was negotiating in secret with the king, spending long hours shooting at l'Isle-Adam trying to work out a solution with the prince de Conti (who apparently thought that Maupeou's attitude was too hard-line). Barbier picks up the story in December 1754: "On admire la fermeté du Roi, qui a su prendre son parti pour maintenir la paix... On respecte infiniment M. le premier président de Maupeou, et cela avec raison; car ceci, indépendamment de toute politique secrète et intérieure, lui fait un grand honneur et le rend un homme d'État." It is probable that the print was published in connection with these events. Dufort de Cheverny summarised the position by 1755:

Les parlements se brouillaient tous les jours de plus en plus contre l'autorité royale; les impôts en étaient le prétexte. Mais rien n'était si ridiculement républicain que le Parlement, quoiqu'il tremblât au moindre coup d'autorité. Cela existera toujours dans les compagnies où deux ou trois meneurs influencent tous les membres, les uns, par ambition pour être placés, les autres, comme le premier président Maupeou, pour jouer un rôle. Ce dernier n'avait l'estime d'aucun parti, mais son esprit suppléait à tout. Bas, haut, fier, insolent, menteur, effronté, caressant, il jouait tous les rôles, sans être estimé, et il faisait faire par d'autres, quand il ne pouvait le faire lui-même, tout ce qui pouvait le conduire au ministère.²⁸

Despite Maupeou having led the grand banc of all the présidents à mortier to Versailles on the night of Damiens's attempted regicide as a demonstration of loyalty in 1756, further

²⁴ Barbier, *op. cit.*, May 1752, p. 234.

²⁵ See John Rogister, *op. cit.*; Rohan Butler, *Choiseul, Father and Son*, I, Oxford, 1980, pp. 1012ff; Barbier, November 1753, p. 433.

²⁶ Le marquis d'Argenson, *Mémoires*, 19 March 1754.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22, 28 August 1754.

²⁸ Dufort de Cheverny, *Mémoires*, Paris, 1909, p. 179.

difficulties (such as the matter of the papal encyclical *Ex omnibus*) resulted in his departure from office on 22 September 1757.²⁹ Cardinal de Bernis explained that “M. de Maupeou, qui, au talent de l'éloquence joignait les grâces extérieures, de l'intrigue et du manège, avait conduit sa compagnie au gré de la cour tant qu'il conserva l'espérance, qu'on lui avait donné, de la place de garde des sceaux; mais sitôt qu'il aperçut qu'on avait changé de dessein, et que cette place importante était destinée à M. de Machault, il comprit que, n'ayant plus rien à atteindre de la cour, il ne lui restait d'autre moyen de se rendre considérable et de se faire rechercher que de s'attacher entièrement à sa compagnie, et de mettre la fermeté du magistrat à la place de la souplesse du courtisan.”³⁰ The marquis d'Argenson had earlier³¹ noted Maupeou's dislike for his brother: “Ce magistrat a de grandes passions de rancune et est d'ailleurs d'une ambition démesurée; du reste homme très-sage et entendant bien le monde et la cour” and now³² noted “M. le premier président Maupeou est aussi mal à la cour que dans sa compagnie, pour avoir voulu garder la chèvre et les choux. Quand il cita au roi, dans des conversations, ce qui s'était passé en 1725 et 1732, sa majesté répondit : alors je ne régnais pas, aujourd'hui je règne par moi-même, et j'ai quarante-six ans.” Michel Antoine's judgement is more succinct: “Ayant trahi tout le monde, il avait perdu la confiance de tout le monde.”³³ As early as May 1757, Barbier reported that “il n'est plus question de M. le premier président, que l'on dit ici être brouillé en Cour, comme avec sa compagnie et le public.” In September, when the news finally broke, Barbier wrote:

Cette nouvelle a surpris le public. On sait bien que depuis le commencement de l'année le public n'a pas parlé avantagement sur le comte de M. de Maupeou...

Mais, au surplus, tout cela n'est que bruits de Paris. Au fond, le Parlement est rentrée; les exilés seront rendus, et le Parlement a plus obtenu, par les réponses du Roi, qu'il ne pouvait espérer et qu'il n'espéroit en effet. Ainsi, les esprits auroient pu revenir sur le compte de M. de Maupeou.

Cependant voici une démission volontaire, sans avoir les sceaux, comme en le présumoit, et sans aucune condition; car les uns disent que le Roi a accordé une pension de quarante mille livres de rente à M. de Maupeou, et de faire payer ses dettes, qui ne laissent pas, dit-on, d'être considérables; d'autres disent qu'il n'y a encore rien de certain là-dessus. Voilà ce qui étonne.

After Lamoignon³⁴ had been exiled and effectively dismissed at the instigation of Choiseul in 1763, Maupeou was recalled as garde des sceaux and was created vice-chancelier, since Lamoignon refused to resign his office as chancelier. At the same time, Molé was dismissed as premier président and replaced by the new vice-chancelier's son René-Nicolas-Charles-Augustin de Maupeou. Mme de Pompadour had a hand in the appointment, probably because of his earlier support for her in the struggle against the parlement, and wrote “M^e le vice-chancelier est rempli de talents, et de bon volonté”.³⁵ Already seventy-five, without proper authority, the elder Maupeou had difficulty in obtaining the support of the senior magistrates whom he had alienated in the crisis of 1756–57.

Finally, in 1768, Lamoignon received the last rites and was persuaded to resign; his real successor was the younger Maupeou, but the king consented to an arrangement under which, at the age of eighty, René-Charles de Maupeou was made chancelier of France: he retained the office for just one day, resigning his position in favour of his son. He died seven years later, just into the reign of Louis XVI, some 62 years after his presentation to the new king's great-great-grandfather. The marquis de Valfons, who had known his “respectable ami” since they met

²⁹ The *Gazette de France* reported that he received a pension of 40,000 livres (1 October 1757).

³⁰ Cardinal de Bernis, *Mémoires*, Paris, 1986, p. 196.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10 December 1754.

³² *Ibid.*, 23 December 1756.

³³ Michel Antoine, *Louis XV*, Paris, 1989, p. 726.

³⁴ A document in the Archives nationales (MC LXVI 531) shows that, on 6 February 1761, Maupeou sold the land and *seigneurie* of Le Blancmesnil to Armand-Guillaume-François de Gourgue, conseiller au parlement; it is not clear how Maupeou acquired his rival's title.

³⁵ Letter of 15 October 1763, cited Rogister, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

at the maréchal de Saxe's château de Chambord in 1749, where Maupeou had entertained him with his "conversation pleine de traits curieux et d'anecdotes intéressantes", was with him during his last moments – "ceux d'un grand homme et d'un sage.... L'homme de bien mourant a je ne sais quoi d'imposant et d'auguste : il semble qu'à mesure qu'il se détache de la terre il prend quelque chose de cette nature divine et inconnue qu'il va revêtir."³⁶ A less charitable view was recorded by Siméon-Prosper Hardy:³⁷

Du jeudi six avril [1775].

Ce jour, à sept heures du matin, est inhumé sans pompe et sans sonnerie dans le cimetière de l'église de Saint-Sulpice, sa paroisse, auprès de la porte dudit cimetière, conformément à ce qu'il avoit ordonné par son testament, *René-Charles de Maupeou père, marquis de Morangle, vicomte de Bruyères, seigneur de Noissy, de Montigny et autres lieux, ancien Premier président du Parlement de Paris, chancelier garde des Sceaux de France*, charge dont il n'avoit été titulaire que vingt-quatre heures seulement pour la transmettre, du consentement du Roi, au *Sieur de Maupeou* son fils qui en étoit revêtu depuis 1768, décédé le mardi précédent en son hôtel rue de Varenne, fauxbourg Saint-Germain, dans la quatre-vingt-septième année de son âge.

Quoiqu'il eût demandé par son testament à n'avoir que six prêtres à son convoi, tout le clergé de la paroisse y assiste pour se conformer aux intentions du curé, et l'on y joint un certain nombre de pauvres auxquels la famille fait donner un flambeau, trois aunes d'étoffe et un écu de six livres. Son corps avoit été mis d'abord dans un cercueil de plomb, puis dans un second cercueil de bois de chesne ayant des mains de fer poli.

On faisoit courir le bruit qu'il laissoit une somme de neuf cent mille livres en or, dont il avoit ordonné le dépôt chez un notaire pour l'exécution de ses dernières volontés qui étoient fort étendues. On ne disoit point que le *Sieur de Maupeou*, chancelier de France, eût eu la permission de quitter le lieu de son exil pour venir recevoir les derniers soupirs dudit *Sieur* son père, qui n'emportoit certainement avec lui ni les regrets ni l'estime du public.

From Maupeou's inventaire après décès, we find an extensive picture collection, or rather several: the first, playing a political rôle, occupied the reception rooms both of the Paris hôtel and of the château de Bruyères, and maintained a royal theme (35 portraits of the kings, queens and enfants de France, a copy of a picture in the royal collection, a view of the gallery of the Luxembourg, a painting of the story of Alexander) or a classical one (Sebastiano del Piombo's *Resurrection of Lazarus*, of which the main version was in the Orléans collection and is now in the National Gallery;³⁸ Sébastien Bourdon, *Le Départ de Jacob*;³⁹ engravings after Le Brun's *Famille de Darius* and *Alexandre triomphant*). In the bedroom in Paris was a second collection demonstrating a more personal taste: small Dutch pictures, genre pieces, scenes of piety and pictures of children. In his private apartments at Bruyères, Maupeou kept some 55 portraits of chancellors and gardes des sceaux as well as 88 prints representing "ports, batailles, réjouissances flamandes". There was also a portrait of "Monsieur le chancelier dans son enfance".⁴⁰

The battle against the parlements was continued by his son, under whose influence the father had progressively fallen. While undoubtedly intelligent, able and diligent, his taste for intrigue and his meanness left him with few friends; his wife Anne de Roncherolles (a cousin of Mme d'Épinay, whose memoirs⁴¹ provide an extremely unflattering portrait of Maupeou under the *nom de clef* of "président de Sally") in particular loathed him. With the aid of Terray and Mme du Barry, Maupeou *le fils* effectively abolished the parlements in 1771 (the so-called coup Maupeou), to the horror of virtually everyone except Voltaire, whose dislike of the

³⁶ *Souvenirs*, Paris, 1907, pp.237f, 385.

³⁷ Hardy, *Mes loisirs...*, MS, BnF.

³⁸ Considerable confusion concerns versions such as the copy by Carle Van Loo installed in the original location, at Narbonne; see Cecil Gould, *National Gallery catalogues: the sixteenth-century Italian schools*, London, 1975, p. 242ff.

³⁹ Possibly the picture now in Houston; again considerable confusion surrounds various versions. See Pierre Rosenberg, *France in the Golden Age*, exhibition catalogue, Paris–New York–Chicago, 1982, no. 8.

⁴⁰ AN MC LXVI 624, 10 April 1775; cited in Olivier Bonfait, "Les collections des parlementaires parisiens du XVIII^e siècle", *Revue de l'art*, no. 73, 1986, pp. 28–42.

⁴¹ Mme d'Épinay, *Les Contre-Confessions*, Paris, 1989.

parlementaires made him forget the younger Maupeou's disgraceful rôle in various miscarriages of justice during the years 1763–68, such as the Calas case; Maupeou himself signed the warrants for the chevalier La Barre and the comte Lally-Tollendal. The younger Maupeou died in 1792 at his property at Le Thuit, near Rouen; many regard his death as suicide. There is no doubt that the reputation of the son has to some extent tarnished that of the father, as reflected in the contemporary satirical epitaph of the latter:

Ci-gît un vieux coquin qui mourut de colère
D'avoir fait un coquin plus coquin de son père.

Gaillard's summary is also negative: “magistrat ignorant, homme aimable, aimé des femmes, il avait par elles du crédit à la cour... Il n'avait jamais entendu une seule des affaires qu'il avait jugées..., cependant il prononçait très bien les arrêts... Il était excellent dans les occasions d'éclat où il fallait de la représentation; à la tête du Parlement, c'était un superbe général d'armée... A la cour, il savait faire rendre à sa compagnie tout ce qui lui était dû avec une hauteur et une noblesse qui le faisait respecter des courtisans... Il était en tout assez bon homme d'ailleurs, quoiqu'on en ait dit.”

When was the present pastel executed? The Salon of 1748 provides only a *terminus ante quem*. The date proposed for the Chevalier version (1745) appears to be derived only from the later Petit engraving, but there is no reason to doubt it. The Nattier must therefore have been executed by 1745. It seems likely therefore that the picture was commissioned to mark Maupeou's promotion to premier président, i.e. soon after the end of 1743. An early date is supported by the apparent youth of the sitter: it is easier to believe that he is 55 than 60 years old; and moreover the colour of the fur indicates that it is relatively new. It is of course historically possible that the image could be earlier: although exhibited in the Salon de 1748 as “le premier président”, the sitter was entitled to the robes he is shown in from as early as 1717 (the premier président is entitled to a mortar with two rows of gold braid, while the président à mortar has only one row; but no cap is shown in the present work). The medical evidence from the progression of the haemangioma is inconclusive. However, the date proposed is also consistent with the known dates of Nattier's other pastels (from 1743 to 1753).

While it is not surprising that the ambitious judge should have commissioned the fashionable Nattier to portray him (and to have had the resultant image engraved), it is less clear how the pastel should have come onto the market in 1993 from the Belgian descendants of the Pommyer family of parlementaires, together with a series of portraits of members of the family by Largillier, and two La Tour pastels, one of the actress Marie Fel, and the other of the abbé François-Emmanuel Pommyer (1713–1784), a close friend of La Tour, and a collector of works by Chardin (as was Maupeou *le fils*). Pommyer's father Yves-Joseph (1665–1748), président trésorier de France au bureau des finances et chambre des domaines de la généralité d'Alençon, later secrétaire du roi, was related to the Lamoignon family and thus to Maupeou's wife. While this might suggest that the picture was presented to the family, in fact it seems most probable that Pommyer acquired the picture at the Nattier sale⁴² in 1763 and that the portrait probably remained in the artist's studio since its commission and exhibition in 1748 – presumably because of Maupeou's financial difficulties. Not only was the abbé Pommyer related to Maupeou, but as a conseiller-clerc member of the grand'chambre du parlement, he would have had frequent contact with the premier président, Maupeou fils. When he wrote to La Tour on 27 October 1767 to thank the artist who, together with Cochin and Chardin, was to propose Pommyer for honorary membership of the Académie, he did so from the château de Bruyères, and asked La Tour to write to him care of “M. le Premier Président, au château de Bruyères, par Luzarche”; this was of course Maupeou fils.

As regards the provenance of the Chevalier, the family believe that it has been retained in

⁴² The purchaser was presumably not recognised by the German-born dealer Paul-Charles-Alexandre Helle whose annotated catalogue survives in the Bibliothèque d'Art et Archéologie (reprinted by Renard 1999), and cited only the price, 37 livres.

the family collection together with the supposed Lemoyne drawing of Maupeou fils; in fact a collector's mark betrays that the latter belonged to the comte de Bizemont (1752–1832) and so must have been bought at a later date by the current Maupeou family (although lineal descendants of the chancellor, they come through an illegitimate branch); it seems most probable that the Chevalier pastel was also acquired by the family at some date before the 1908 exhibition. The oil copy made by Caroline de Maupeou earlier this century adds nothing to the evidence.

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