

Vigée Le Brun, *Nicolas Beaujon*

NEIL JEFFARES



[Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun](#)

Nicolas Beaujon (1712–1788)

Pastel on two sheets of vellum, 71x57.8 cm, oval

1784

Private collection

PROVENANCE: In the artist's collection until at least the 1830s. Dr Jules-Marie-François Aussant (1805–1872), Rennes; Paris, 28–30 December 1863, Lot 46 (as “peinture de La Tour”), FFr 330; Edmond et Jules de Goncourt; Paris, Drouot, 15–17 February 1897, Lot 232, FFr 3000 (as attributed to Perronneau; possibly Ducreux); Paris, François-Wilbrod Chabrol (1835–1919). Private collection. Exhibited: *Dessins de maîtres anciens exposés à l'École des Beaux-Arts, mai-juin 1879*, no. 541; *Cent pastels 1908*, no. 101, pl. 88, as Perronneau, Goyon de Vaudurant

LITERATURE: Virginie Ancelot, *Les Salons de Paris*, Paris, 1858, p. 41; Edmond & Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, 30, 31 December 1863; Edmond & Jules de Goncourt, “La Tour”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, February, April 1867, pp. 127–53, 350–71; Charles-Philippe, marquis de Chennevières-Pointel, “Les dessins de maîtres anciens exposés à l'École des Beaux-Arts en 1879”, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, xx, 1879, p. 202 (“Perronneau, avec le portrait de M. Goyon de Vaudurant, sous-gouverneur de Bretagne, acquis apr MM. de Goncourt à la vente Aussant, beau pastel d'une couleur intense et empâtée, rappelant

les tons de l'école anglaise, fait ici assez bonne figure à côté de son rival.”); Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, Paris, 1881, I, pp. 135–6; Maurice Tourneux, “Jean-Baptiste Perronneau”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1896, p. 319 (reproduced as Goyon by Perronneau); Lady Dilke, *French Painters of the XVIIIth Century*, London, 1899, p. 171 (not reproduced); Hippolyte Mireur, *Dictionnaire des ventes d'art faites en France et à l'étranger pendant les XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles*, Paris, 1901–12, v, p. 534; Maurice Tourneux, *Jean-Baptiste Perronneau*, Paris, 1903, p. 47 (reproduced as Goyon by Perronneau); *A.L.A. Portrait Index*, Washington, 1906 (under Goyon); Louis de Fourcaud, “Le pastel et les pastellistes français au XVIII^e siècle”, *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, xxiv, July–December 1908, pp. 288–291 (as of Goyon but rejecting attribution to Perronneau); Maurice Tourneux, “L'exposition des cent pastels”, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, July 1908, pp. 5–16, p. 10 (as of Goyon by Perronneau, 1781); Haldane Macfall, *The French pastellists of the eighteenth century*, London, 1909, p. 188 (as Goyon by Perronneau); Louis Vaillat & Paul Ratouis de Limay, *Perronneau*, Paris, 1909, no. 189, pl. 83 (reproduced as attributed to Perronneau but rejected in text); 1923 edition, pp. 132, 147, 173, 184, 241 (not reproduced); Haldane Macfall, *The French genius*, London, 1911, p. 216 (as Goyon by Perronneau); Besnard & Wildenstein, *La Tour*, Paris, 1928, no. 165, uncertain attribution; Joseph Baillio, “Quelques peintures réattribuées à Vigée Le Brun”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, t. 99, January 1982, pp. 13–26, reproduced, as Beaujon by Vigée Le Brun; Élisabeth de Launay, *Les Frères Goncourt collectionneurs de dessins*, Paris, 1991, no. 250 reproduced, as attributed to Perronneau; Jo Hedley, “Vigée Le Brun's newly conserved ‘Mme Perregaux’ in the Wallace Collection”, *Burlington Magazine*, cxlvi, April 2004, pp. 224–233, p. 224 and n. 7, n.r.; 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. 549, reproduced

RELATED WORKS: two other portraits by Mme Vigée Le Brun, both lost; anonymous copy, hst, 0.72x0.58 (Paris, musée Carnavalet, inv. P.1398. Don Ernest May 1922)

ICONOGRAPHY: (I) Louis-Michel Van Loo, oil on canvas, sd 1758 (Musée Jacquemart André, Chaalis); (II) Pierre Allais, oil on canvas, 65x52 cm, c.1762 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers); copy, possibly by X. Védère, in Chambre de Commerce, Bordeaux; (III) Cochin, black chalk. Grav.: Mme Lingée, “N. Beaujon, Conseiller d'Etat, Trésorier honoraire de l'ordre royale et militaire de

Saint Louis”, 26.2x18.5 cm. Exh.: Paris 1978, no. 54 reproduced; (IV) marble bust, traditionally attributed to Houdon¹ (Musée de l’Assistance Publique, Paris), reproduced André Masson, *Un mécène bordelais*; (V) Pierre-Louis Dumesnil (1698–1781), “Le Traitant”, oil on canvas, 32x41 (Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Legs Poirson 1900). Exh. Galerie Cailleux 1970, reproduced. Grav.: Lucas.

GENEALOGY: [Beaujon](#)

ON 30 DECEMBER 1863, between three and four o’clock in the afternoon, this pastel entered the apartment at 43, rue Saint-Georges belonging to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. The brothers were excited to find it on their return from a fencing lesson: “Un commissionnaire nous apporte des Commissaires-Priseurs un magnifique pastel de Perronneau, pour lequel nous avons donné commission, dimanche, à une vente de tableaux de l’École française. Nous nous habillons, mettons des cravates blanches, allons dîner chez la Princesse [Mathilde], revenons et fumons une pipe, en adoration devant notre Perronneau, posé sur la table de notre chambre.” The magic took its effect: the entry for New Year’s Eve is “En regardant le Perronneau et nos tapisseries de Beauvais, je songe que le XVIII^e siècle a eu, dans son ameublement d’art, le velouté.” The vendor, Dr Aussant, was a celebrated doctor and archaeologist from Rennes, responsible for founding a number of local institutions including the Musée of which he was honorary director; he had attributed the anonymous pastel of an unknown subject to La Tour. For the Goncourts, the quality of the colouring was more characteristic of the English school and indicated Perronneau² rather than La Tour, a fact confirmed in their minds by the subsequent correspondence with Dr Aussant in which he proposed an identification of the subject as Louis-Claude, comte Gouyon de Vaudurant (1714–1792), lieutenant-général de Bretagne 1780, commandeur de l’ordre de Saint-Louis 1781:³ by 1781 La Tour was mad and could not be the author. The Goncourts lent the portrait to the École des Beaux-Arts exhibition of 1879, where Philippe de Chennevières picked up the colourist theme: “Perronneau, avec le portrait de M. Gouyon de Vaudurant, sous-gouverneur de Bretagne, acquis par MM. de Goncourt à la vente Aussant, beau pastel d’une couleur intense et empâtée, rappelant les tons de l’école anglaise, fait ici bonne figure à côté de son rival.”⁴ In *La Maison d’un artiste*, Edmond again recognised here “tous les caractères du faire de Perronneau”, and said that “La Tour ne s’est [jamais] élevé à ces clartés d’une figure faites de la pose franche de touches de bleu, de vert, balafrees de rose, qui ont la plus grande parenté avec les couleurs à l’huile des portraits de Reynolds, des portraitistes anglais de la fin du XVIII^e siècle.” This English quality of Perronneau was a favourite hobby horse of Edmond de Goncourt, and was recorded by Reynaldo Hahn⁵ one evening chez Alphonse Daudet: «Après le dîner arrivent plusieurs personnes. Sur le canapé, Goncourt me parle longuement de peinture.... Je lui raconte ma visite



Figure 1

¹ Louis Réau, *Houdon*, Paris, 1964, I, p. 335: “Suivant des traditions assez vagues, qui demanderaient confirmation, Houdon aurait modelé les bustes de deux autres financiers dont l’opulence était proverbiale: Baudard de Saint-James, trésorier général de la marine et des colonies, et le Bordelais Beaujon.”

² In *L’Art du XVIII^e siècle*, 3^e éd., I, p. 230, n. 2, the Goncourts wrote “Perronneau est un coloriste supérieure à La Tour. Il y a de la lumineuse école anglaise, du Reynolds don son pastel...”. The depth of colour in the present work may perhaps recall the work of John Russell.

³ See Père Anselme.

⁴ Cited Vaillat & Ratouis de Limay, *Perronneau*, Paris, 1923, p. 147.

⁵ Notes. *Journal d’un musicien*, Paris, 1933, pp. 21–22.

au Louvre, le questionne sur les pastellistes. Il admire surtout Perronneau, le place très au-dessus des deux autres et le considère comme le peintre de l'école anglaise, "bien que personne ne s'en soit jamais aperçu", ajoute-t-il avec un petit ricanement. »

Reproducing the work with the authorisation of Edmond de Goncourt in his study on Perronneau, Maurice Tourneux accepted the post-1781 date based on Vaudurant's promotion, and described it as "un témoignage éclatant de la vitalité [du] talent [de Perronneau] à cette époque."⁶ By the time of the Goncourt sale in 1897, the expert expressed reservations about the attribution to Perronneau, suggesting the possibility of Ducreux; but these concerns were ignored by Lady Dilke, who wrote two years later, citing the "fine portrait of the comte de Vaudurant wearing the ribbon of St. Louis which he received in 1781" as evidence that Perronneau's "vigour...remained undiminished to the last." When the new owner, the architect Wilbrod Chabrol, lent it to the Cent Pastels exhibition of 1908, it



Figure 2

appeared again as by Perronneau (ironically the owner also lent the Pajou bust of Mme Vigée Le Brun which is now in the Louvre). Vaillat and Ratouis de Limay were unimpressed, writing in 1909 "Nous restons tout aussi sceptiques quant à l'attribution à Perronneau d'une œuvre très honorable, qui n'a aucune des qualités de délicatesse, de légèreté qu'on observe généralement dans l'œuvre de cet artiste...". Bizarrely, in the 1923 edition they changed the words "très honorable" in the above passage to "retouché"; while their conclusion has been proved right, one wonders if they had looked closely at the work since the 1908 exhibition. The profile of the picture then receded somewhat, and until now it has remained unseen publicly. Mme de Launay's otherwise exemplary study of the Goncourts' collection merely summarised the above sources, recalling the Goncourt sale expert's suggestion of Ducreux; but she failed to record Joseph Baillio's brilliant deduction,⁷ based on the Vaillat & Ratouis de Limay reproduction, that this must be a portrait of Nicolas Beaujon by Mme Vigée Le Brun.

Baillio knew, from the artist's *Souvenirs*, of her portraits of the aged financier, but his searches in Bordeaux and Paris had thrown up (in addition to the well-known 1758 image by Louis-Michel van Loo at Chaalis, fig. 1) only the mediocre copies of the Allais portrait (of which a better version is in Angers, fig. 2)⁸ and the execrable oil painting in the musée Carnavalet (fig. 3). The latter, which bears virtually the same lengthy inscription as the Bordeaux painting, is evidently derived from the same image as the pastel. A bust, traditionally ascribed to Houdon, is also helpful (Paris, musée de l'Assistance publique, fig. 4); it also shows him "coiffé à l'oiseau royal". Combined with the stylistic similarities between the pastel and other works of Vigée Le Brun, such as the 1779 pastel of the duc d'Orléans, and the artist's hallmarks, such as the use of wet pastel in the lace jabot, Baillio's identification is compelling. Baillio has now had the opportunity to confirm the attribution on the basis of a direct examination of the work (7 July 2002).

Nicolas Beaujon⁹ (1712–1788) is a complex and fascinating figure. In his lifetime, his name

⁶ Maurice Tourneux, *Jean-Baptiste Perronneau*, Paris, 1903, p. 48, reproduced p. 47.

⁷ "Quelques peintures réattribuées à Vigée Le Brun", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1982; the résumé notes that the pastel is the most significant rediscovery in the article.

⁸ A circular version, without the cordon rouge, has been sold with an attribution to F.-H. Drouais, most recently by Christie's, Monaco, 30 June 1995, Lot 50, reproduced.

⁹ For the basic biographical details, see the *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, article by Valérie-Noëlle Jouffre in *The Grove Dictionary of Art*; Jal; Favre Lejeune; Père Anselme; and Thierry Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers en France au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 2009, I, p. 160–68. Gustave Labat's two notes in the *Actes de l'Académie nationale des sciences, belles lettres et arts de Bordeaux*, 1901, pp. 47–108, and 1906, pp. 17–31 have not been supplanted. The principal biography is André Masson, *Un mécène bordelais: Nicolas Beaujon 1718–1782*, Bordeaux, 1937. See also Charles Leroux-Cesbron, *Le Palais de l'Élysée*, Paris, 1925; Albert Rèche, *Dix siècles de vie quotidienne à Bordeaux*, Paris, 1983, pp. 17–20; J. F. Bosher, "Financing the French navy in the Seven Years War: Beaujon,

was a synonym for wealth – a fortune of which one cannot know the limits¹⁰ – but his name is now largely forgotten except as the founder of the Paris hospital. He was born into a Huguenot family in Bordeaux, of considerable but recent wealth – his grandfather was a shopkeeper in a village near Marmande who made a fortune trading in grain before moving into colonial trading. His son married a member of the wealthy Delmaistre family. Nicolas had two younger brothers also called Nicolas (one was *généalogiste des ordres du roi* in 1758), leading to considerable confusion in the literature.¹¹ The family's wealth is evident in the magnificent house at 11, rue du Parlement. It is alleged that Beaujon used his control of the market to drive prices up, leading to great hardship among the poor and contributing to the famine of 1753. Although supported by the intendant Tourny, Beaujon felt his honour and credit were undermined by the scandal, and he moved to Paris – thereby avoiding the legal proceedings which some of his detractors had commenced. Here, in October 1753, he married Louise-Élisabeth Bontemps, daughter of Louis XV's *valet de chambre*; the marriage contract¹² showed Beaujon's total assets as 490,000 livres (of which a quarter was invested in shipping ventures to the West Indies, Africa and Canada). No doubt the duc de Richelieu¹³ confused Beaujon with Bontemps in his the story of Louis XV first tryst with Mme de Mailly (1733), in which “le financier Beaujon” was charged with collecting the lady under a specified tree in the Tuileries at 4 p.m., asking “Est-ce vous, madame?” and, on receiving her affirmative answer, conducting her to Versailles; not a single further word was exchanged. Mlle Bontemps was a niece of maréchal de Varennes and her cousin was the deceased wife of Ange-Laurent La Live de Jully, who was a witness on the marriage contract; other witnesses included Mme de Pompadour and ministers Machaud, d'Argenson, Paulmy, Rouillé and Saint-Florentin. Beaujon's fortune was already 490,000 livres; his wife brought only 50,000 livres (which were never paid), but her connections gave Beaujon an entry into high society.



Figure 3

Beaujon proceeded to acquire a series of noble offices such as, in 1756, that of *receveur général des finances de La Rochelle* for even-numbered years. He was ennobled by *brevet* of 14 September 1763, and became *secrétaire du roi* in 1766. In 1767 he was nominated one of the fifteen directors of the new Caisse d'Escompte. He became *conseiller d'État* in 1769, and was banker to the court and to Mme du Barry. In this capacity, for example, he was called upon to advance 600 livres to the actors Brizard and Mme Vestris being the “gratifications” awarded to them by the duc de Duras, but which the budget of the Menus plaisirs could not afford.¹⁴ But his influence depended on larger sums: when Choiseul threatened to have him hanged (Choiseul later wrote¹⁵ to Louis XV blaming Berryer for the navy's decline “parce qu'il était trompé par un coquine de banquier nommé Beaujon, lequel a cependant toujours conserve, malgré ses friponneries, du credit à la Cour”), Beaujon replied: “Ah! Monseigneur ne fera pas pendre un homme qui a toujours un million à sa service.”¹⁶ Indeed the fortunes of the French government were so inextricably interlinked with those of Beaujon that when the firm of Beaujon, Goossens et Cie (which Beaujon had formed in 1751 with the Huguenot Pierre-François Goossens) went bankrupt in November 1759 an *arrêt de surséance* was immediately issued allowing the firm to

Goossens et Compagnie in 1759”, in R. P. T. Davenport-Hines & Jonathan Liebenau, *Business in the Age of Reason*, London, 1987, pp. 115–33; and J. F. Boshier, *The Canada merchants, 1713–1763*, Oxford, 1987.

¹⁰ Mlle de Lespinasse, letter of 30 October 1774, to the comte de Guibert.

¹¹ According to Général baron Thiébault, *Mémoires*, Paris, 1894, III, p. 310n, Beaujon's brother refused to accept any form of financial support from the financier, presumably because of disapproval of the source of his wealth.

¹² AN T306, contract of 21–22 October 1753 under notaries Patu and Dutartre, cited Boshier, *op. cit.* 1987, n. 25.

¹³ *Mémoires*, Paris, 1829, VI, pp. 164f.

¹⁴ Papillon de La Ferté, *Journal des Menus plaisirs du roi*, 15 August 1771, Paris, 2002, p. 210.

¹⁵ *Mémoire justificatif présenté au roi*, 1765, cited Masson, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁶ At least according to Général baron Thiébault, *loc. cit.*

trade itself out of difficulty. Whether the lack of funding, or Beaujon's role, can be held responsible for the French defeat at Quiberon Bay that year is unclear, but major reform in the financing of the navy was required.

Beaujon had no legitimate children, but may¹⁷ have been the father of Adélaïde de Presle (1758–1794); she married the Swiss banker Jean-Frédéric Perregaux in 1779, and their daughter Anne-Marie-Hortense (1779–1957) (to whom Beaujon was parrain, leaving her some 60,000 livres in his will) became the *maréchale-duchesse de Raguse* under Napoléon. Among portraits of Adélaïde are the beautiful oil by Mme Vigée Le Brun in the Wallace collection, a pastel by Hall recorded in his *livre de comptes* and another in a private collection attributed to Bornet. Following the death of his wife in 1769, Beaujon was associated with the notorious actress Mlle Raucourt – a fact picked up by Bachaumont:



Figure 4

Le sieur Beaujon, banquier de la cour, est fort engoué de la nouvelle actrice; quoique ce lourd financier n'ait jamais été homme de lettres, il veut présider aux leçons de cette jeune débutante: il fait faire les répétitions chez lui; on prétend qu'il en veut plus à la femme qu'au talent.

On souhaite fort qu'elle dégrossisse un peu ce Turcaret, aujourd'hui le Plutus à la mode et qui a failli être pendu en 1748.¹⁸

By 1773, he had several young ladies who were known as his “berceuses” – a term Bachaumont explained: “elles l'accompagnent jusqu'au lit, l'endorement par leurs contes et leur cajoleries”.¹⁹ A few weeks later, Bachaumont wrote at greater length about Beaujon's lifestyle:

Il se lève à quatre heures du matin et travaille jusqu'à neuf; il s'habille alors et prend son chocolat, reçoit des visites et donne des audiences, etc.; il dîne en grande compagnie et vit en société pendant toute la soirée...

A neuf heures, il se couche; quand il est au lit, on ouvre les rideaux aux familiers et surtout aux *berceuses* qui entrent, le cajolent jusqu'à neuf heures et demie, qu'on ferme les rideaux.

Après, on va souper, et la compagnie fait tout ce qu'elle veut et se retire quand bon lui semble.²⁰

The scandal was not the liaisons themselves, but that these ladies, including Mme de Bonneuil and her sister, Mme Thilorier, Mme du Lys and the baronne de Cangé, openly lived in Beaujon's house, each with her own apartments.

To accommodate his art collection, not to say his seraglio, Beaujon purchased the hôtel d'Evreux (formerly occupied by Mme de Pompadour and now the palais de l'Élysée, fig. 5) in 1773, for the sum of one million livres.²¹ This did not enhance his standing in all eyes: according to the marquise de Créquy, “Le vieux Beaujon, qui vient d'acheter d'hôtel de Pompadour, est au-dessous d'une épigramme; il est si ras-terre et si platement bènêt, que personne n'a le courage de s'en moquer; ce serait grêler sur le persil.”²² Blondel had already described the future Élysée palace as “la plus belle maison d'habitation des environs de Paris”, but Beaujon engaged Boullée to carry out extensive improvements to the interior of the house, including paintings by Le Barbier. Here he kept his library of nearly 5000 books under the librarian Meunier de Querlon

¹⁷ Michel Bruguère, *Pour une renaissance de l'histoire financière*, Paris, 1991, p. 315. There is little direct evidence for this, although the marriage of her legal father Bernardin, comte du Praël to a certain Louise Dalis-Geffriée seems unusually poorly documented, and in 1777 Quantin de Villiers was appointed guardian “en l'absence de toute famille”, although her uncle, Jean-Baptiste du Praël, comte de Surville was still alive.

¹⁸ *Mémoires Secrets*, 28 December 1772, VI, pp. 289f.

¹⁹ *Mémoires secrets*, VII, pp. 75–76.

²⁰ *Mémoires secrets*, November 1773, VII, p. 93.

²¹ See, e.g., Hillairet, *op. cit.*; Braham, *op. cit.* Only 600,000 livres were in fact paid in cash.

²² *Souvenirs de la marquise de Créquy de 1710 à 1803*, V, p. 163.

(later bequeathed to the Académie de Bordeaux to form the nucleus of the municipal library)²³ and the same number of bottles of the finest wines. He acquired magnificent Sèvres porcelain²⁴ and outstanding French furniture, which made up the majority of the lots in the auction after his death.²⁵

His collection of fine art was however of the greatest importance.²⁶ Doubtless influenced by his cousin La Live de Jully, but also by his neighbours in the apartment in the Tuileries which he occupied immediately after his marriage, Servandoni and Oudry, he developed considerable taste, acquiring pictures at the Julienne sale in 1767. He was influenced also by dealers such as Rémy, Dubois and Le Brun, Mme Vigée Le Brun's husband. His most important purchases were made in the 1770s, at the sales of Randon de Boisset, Blondel de Gagny, Conti and Ménars. This sudden, enormous supply of art saturated the market, and while Beaujon had active competition in the first two sales, he was virtually alone in bidding at the Conti sale. Among the treasures in the sale were the Holbein *Ambassadors*, now in the National Gallery;²⁷ two Rembrandts (an *Assuérus*, *Esther et Mardochee* now lost, and a *Buste d'un homme le chapeau sur la tête* which cannot be



Figure 5

identified); five Rubens (a hunting scene; the *Réconciliation d'Esai et de Jacob* now in Munich; three portraits, among them one of Gaston, Louis XIII's brother); a Veronese; French pictures by Boucher (a sketch for *Vénus commandant à Vulcain des armes pour Enée*), Cochin (*La Dame cachetant une lettre*), Pater (*Le Bal champêtre* and *La Balance*), Lancret (*Les Quatres Éléments*), Greuze (*Le Baiser envoyé*, from the 1769 Salon), Coypel, Le Brun (*Vénus et Amor*, Puerto Rico),²⁸ Raoux, Poussin, Chardin,²⁹ Natoire (*L'Éducation de l'Amour*), Vallayer-Coster, Carle Van Loo (the *Énée*

portant son père Anchise in the Louvre), Largillierre and de Troy; and the most remarkable series of Dutch pictures by Metsu (including the *Femme en corset rouge, jupon de satin blanc touchant du clavecin* from the Randon de Boisset collection), Van Ostade, Hals, Wouwermann, Van de Velde, Wenix etc. Ter Borch's *The Letter* and Dou's *Jeune femme récurant un chaudron* are now in the Royal Collection; Van Mieris's *La Correspondance* is in the Rijksmuseum. Beaujon's collection was sufficiently celebrated to merit an entry in the *Almanach des artistes* of 1777.³⁰ The sale catalogue included some 16 pastels, mostly genre and *galant* pictures rather than portraits, none of which has been identified but which cannot include the present work. The sculpture included some fine works by lesser artists, among them Laurent Guiard, René Frémin and Tassaert.

Apart from the works included in his sale, Beaujon reserved for his legacy to the Chambre de commerce de Guyenne (of which he was director) the items he regarded as most precious: a series of portraits of the royal family, essentially copies and studio repetitions of familiar works whose importance to our eyes is more historical than aesthetic. Among Beaujon's more

²³ According to Bachaumont, Beaujon bought the library which Hémery had created in the Hôtel d'Evreux; Meunier de Querlon was "assez bas", undertaking the work for board and lodging and a pension of 1200 livres (*Mémoires secrets*, 6 May 1774, VII, p. 193).

²⁴ Such as the magnificent oyster pyramid he acquired from the factory in 1765 (now in Dalmeny House).

²⁵ An excellent example was Lot 509, the magnificent commode stamped Joseph, in sycamore, decorated with bouquets of flowers painted by Leriche or Prevost, probably designed by Boullée; it is reproduced in Alexandre Pradère, *French Furniture Makers*, London, 1989, pl. 248.

²⁶ See André Masson, "La Galerie Beaujon", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1937, pp. 47–59.

²⁷ The picture had come into the Lamoignon family. It has been suggested that Beaujon's executor, Lamoignon de Bâville, took the opportunity of the sale to dispose of his own property; but it seems at least as plausible that Beaujon had previously acquired the painting from him.

²⁸ Reproduced, Colin B. Bailey, *Pastelistic Taste*, London, 2002, p. 187. The picture was acquired by Vaudreuil at the Beaujon sale.

²⁹ See Pierre Rosenberg, *Chardin: new thoughts*, Lawrence, 1983, pp. 26f.

³⁰ See also Notes supplémentaires by Baron J. Pichon in the *Livre-Journal de Lazare Duvaux, marchand-bijoutier, 1748–1758*, ed. J. Courajod, Paris, 1873, I, p. ccxxx.

remarkable financial undertakings were his support for Gustave III's *coup d'état* in 1772. The new king gave Beaujon a portrait in gratitude, which Beaujon included in his legacy to the *Chambre de commerce* (but which appears to have been lost). The legacy also included a remarkable series of Gobelin tapestries, including the portraits and genre pieces which Beaujon ordered from Audran and Cozette. Pierre-François Cozette (1714–1801), a pupil of Parrocel, exhibited these portraits at the *Salons*; no. 292 in the *Salon de 1773* was the portrait of the Dauphin belonging to Beaujon. Perhaps the finest is Cozette's portrait of Marie-Antoinette, inspired by the Drouais portrait in the V&A.

Beaujon's wife died in 1769. The *Mémoires secrets* did not miss the opportunity to poke fun, printing in full the lady's titles from the funeral invitation: "On a trouvé ces titres si ridicules et si contradictoires que les curieux gardent précieusement ces lettres d'enterrement qu'on veut faire passer à postérité la plus reculée."³¹

Beaujon sought the more relaxed surroundings of a country house. At Issy, he acquired land from 1760; here he commissioned Boullée³² to build a *maison de plaisance*; it has now become the *hôtel de ville*, but recent restoration has restored the sumptuous interior of the Grand Salon which Beaujon instructed Boullée to copy from the *hôtel d'Evreux*. By 1781 he decided to build on the enormous territories adjacent to the *hôtel d'Evreux*, and he engaged the architect Nicolas-Claude Girardin (–1786), Boullée's pupil (who had assisted him in renovating the *Palais de l'Élysée*), to build a folly further down the *rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré* in the district of Roule. This building, known as the *Pavillon de La Chartreuse*, was constructed in the style of a Dutch farm, complete with a Gothic windmill (fig. 6 shows an 1827 painting by Guyot), situated where the modern *rues Balzac* and Beaujon intersect. Nearby Girardin built the *Chapelle de Saint-Nicolas*, on a circular plan with a façade in the stripped geometrical style he had learnt from Boullée: it had no portico and no mouldings on the exterior, while two rows of Doric columns decorated the nave and eight Ionic columns formed a rotunda around the altar.

The *Mémoires secrets* again recorded Beaujon's activities:

Le sieur Beaujon, banquier de la cour, a acheté depuis quelques années un vaste terrain à la porte de Chaillot, d'environ 100 arpents, qu'il a fait enclorre pour y faire un jardin à l'anglaise, il a fait également construire un petit bâtiment dans le goût de *Bagatelle*, qu'il appelle son *Ermitage*.

Son projet paraissait d'en faire cadeau à Monsieur, frère du roi. Ce prince est allé le visiter avec Madame, et, depuis, c'est fureur de voir l'*Ermitage*; mais il faut avoir une autorisation du financier... une bizarrerie du lieu, c'est une chapelle, bien qu'elle soit essentielle à un ermitage; elle est fort belle.³³

Opposite the chapel Beaujon had Girardin build the *Hospice Beaujon*,³⁴ founded to support the education of 24 poor children from the district, who were to be supported between the ages of 6 and 12, and then released into the world with a gift of 400 livres. A massive, sober construction with Doric columns surrounding the entrance to a square courtyard. The orphanage subsequently became a hospital and retained its name when it moved to Clichy; the building still stands (at 208, *rue du faubourg Saint Honoré*), for some time as the *préfecture de police* and now an arts centre. Beaujon entrusted the administration of



Figure 6

³¹ *Mémoires secrets*, III, p. 138.

³² See Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, *Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728–1799), de l'architecture classique à l'architecture révolutionnaire*, Paris, 1969; and an article by Yves Grémont in *L'Estampille*, February 1996.

³³ *Mémoires secrets*, 16 August 1783, XIII, pp. 106–7.

³⁴ See Charles Fournel, *L'Hôpital Beaujon. Histoire depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, 1884; Pierre Valléry-Radot, *Nos hôpitaux parisiens. Deux siècles d'histoire, de Henri IV à Louis-Philippe (1602–1836)*, Paris, 1947; Allan Braham, *The architecture of the French Enlightenment*, London, 1980, p. 242, fig. 327.

the hospice to Chrétien-François II de Lamoignon, marquis de Bâville, his executor.³⁵

Not all observers disapproved of Beaujon, although his peculiar domestic arrangements caused some confusion. For Mme de Genlis:

M. de Beaujon est aussi bon, aussi généreux que magnifique; sa vaste maison est une petite république, dans laquelle tout le monde est heureux. Loin d'avoir la tyrannie, si commune, de forcer ses gens au célibate, il les engage tous à se marier, et il loge et nourrit leurs femmes et leurs enfans. Quand ces derniers sont en âge de travailler, il les place chez des artisans, et paie leur apprentissage. Il recueille le fruit de cette bonté touchante: il a des domestiques sages, sédentaires et affectionnés; enfin, M. de Beaujon a fondé un hospice pour les pauvres malades; ne faut-il donc pas lui pardonner de coucher dans un lit qui représente une corbeille de roses! on doit avoir des idées si douces et si riantes quand on peut faire autant de bien!³⁶

Mme d'Oberkirch accompanied the “comtesse du Nord”, i.e. the Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna, formerly Sophia Dorothea von Württemberg, the future Tsar Paul's wife, on a visit on 14 June 1782:

Nous allâmes d'abord chez M. de Beaujon, le banquier de la cour, où il déploie tout le luxe des banquiers les plus riches. Les princes ne sont rien auprès de cela, si ce n'est la solidité pourtant et la magnificence positive.

La maison de M. Beaujon, qu'il appelle son ermitage, est un bâtiment situé au milieu d'un jardin à l'anglaise, qu'il a fait planter dans un vaste terrain près de la grille de Chaillot, aux Champs-Élysées. C'est une vraie campagne, avec une ménagerie, une laiterie, et même une chapelle. La maison est meublée magnifiquement, des meubles anciens surtout et des *vernis-Martin* admirables. On nous montra un escalier en bois d'acajou et une table à manger du même bois de trente couverts. Je ne dis rien des statues, des tableaux, des objets curieux qu'on trouve à chaque pas; il faudrait un catalogue. La bibliothèque est célèbre; on y voit les éditions les plus rares. Les princes de la famille royale ont tous donné leur portrait à M. de Beaujon, je ne sais à quel titre; peut-être est-ce à cause de la beauté de ses salons, qui ne sont pas fort grands, mais où tout est soigné, tout est splendide, jusqu'aux plus petits détails.

La vie de ce financier est, à ce qu'on assure, des plus singuliers. Il était malade, et il lui était défendu de manger autre chose qu'une sorte de brouet au lait sans sucre. Il donnait des dîners dignes de Comus, il voyait manger ses convives, il sentait l'odeur des mets, et il ne touchait à rien. Il était entouré des plus jolies femmes de Paris, qui le traitaient tout à fait sans conséquence; elle le lutinaient et l'agaçaient sans cesse. La moindre galanterie lui était défendue, les émotions lui étaient interdites. Le soir sa maison était pleine d'une joyeuse compagnie, le souper était étincelant, les mots et les bouchons se croisaient. Pendant ce temps, le propriétaire, ce Crésus envié de tous, était condamné à se mettre au lit, où il ne dormait pas à cause de ses souffrances. Ces dames se relevaient autour de lui, et l'une après l'autre le berçaient de leurs chansons, de leurs histoires, de leurs propos. De là le nom de *berceuses* de M. de Beaujon, qu'on leur donna fort généreusement. Du reste c'était un homme excellent, faisant un bien infini, et employant sa fortune en bonnes œuvres.³⁷



Figure 7

Apart from his public works of benevolence, Beaujon was privately generous. Beaujon and his wife were godparents at the baptism in 1763 of one of the children of Carlo Bertinazzi, the actor. Later, the bankruptcy of one of Watelet's cashiers deprived the actor Carlo Bertinazzi of the capital of 50,000 livres intended to support his family; soon afterwards, he and his wife performed for Beaujon, who noticed that the actor was downcast; the explanation was reluctantly given to the banker, who offered to provide a dowry of this amount for one of Carlin's daughters, who was musical but

³⁵ *Mémoires secrets*, xxxiii, 21 December 1786, cited in Yves Durand, *Les Fermiers généraux*, Paris, 1971.

³⁶ *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis*, Paris, 1825, ix, pp. 129f.

³⁷ *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirch sur la cour de Louis XVI et la société française avant 1789*, éd. Suzanne Burkard, Paris, 1970, p. 286f.

blind.³⁸ Carlin's wife was the sister-in-law of Jean-Baptiste Rivière, the chargé d'affaires in Paris of the Saxon court; his daughter Suzanne married Vigée Le Brun's brother Étienne in 1784.

Nevertheless, the reputation for greed and the corpulence which is evident even in the Van Loo portrait of 1758 made Beaujon an easy target for satire, as indicated by the curious painting "Le traitant" by Dumesnil now in Bordeaux (fig. 7). Allais's portrait of c.1763 is more conventional, showing the financier wearing the sash, not of a commandeur, but of the Trésorier honoraire de l'ordre royale et militaire de Saint Louis to which he had become entitled.³⁹ If it seems odd that a financier should have acquired an order which was still at least nominally for military purposes, one should remember that his brother was *généalogiste des ordres du roi* – a position in which he was succeeded by the famous Chérin. Another image, closer to the present work, is that of Cochin, known from the engraving by Mme Lingée (fig. 8).

Beaujon summoned Mme Vigée Le Brun to the Palais d'Evreux in 1784. Her *Portrait à la plume* of her client is worth quoting in full:

M. de Beaujon m'ayant fait demander de faire son portrait, qu'il destinait à l'hôpital fondé par lui dans le faubourg du Roule, et qui porte encore son nom, je me rendis dans le magnifique hôtel qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'Elysée-Bourbon, attendu que l'infortuné millionnaire était hors d'état de venir chez moi. Je le trouvai seul, assis sur un grand fauteuil à roulettes, dans une salle à manger: il avait les mains et les jambes tellement enflées qu'il ne pouvait se servir ni des unes ni des autres; son dîner se bornait à un triste plat d'épinards; mais plus loin, en face de lui, était dressée une table de trente à quarante couverts où se faisait, dit-on, une chère exquise, et qu'on allait servir pour quelques femmes, amies intimes de M. de Beaujon, ainsi que pour les personnes qu'il leur plaisait d'inviter; ces dames, toutes fort bien nées et de très-bonne compagnie, étaient appelées dans le monde les *berceuses* de M. de Beaujon. Elles donnaient les ordres chez lui, disposaient entièrement de son hôtel, de ses chevaux, et payaient ces avantages avec quelques instants de conversation qu'elles accordaient un pauvre impotent, ennuyé de vivre seul.

M. de Beaujon voulut me retenir à dîner, ce que je refusai, ne dînant jamais hors de chez moi; mais nous convînmes du prix et de la pose de son portrait; il désirait être peint assis devant son bureau, jusqu'à mi-jambes, avec les deux mains, et je ne tardai pas à commencer et à finir cet ouvrage. Quand je pus me passer du modèle, j'emportai le portrait chez moi pour terminer quelques détails, et j'imaginai de placer sur le bureau le plan de l'hospice. M. de Beaujon, en ayant été instruit, m'envoya aussitôt son valet de chambre pour me prier instamment d'effacer ce plan, et pour me remettre trente louis en dédommagement du temps que j'y avais employé; ayant à peine tracé l'esquisse, je refusai naturellement les trente louis; mais le valet de chambre revint encore le lendemain, et insista tellement de la part de son maître, que, pour le forcer à remporter cet argent, je fus obligée d'effacer le plan devant lui, afin de lui prouver que cela ne me faisait perdre cinq minutes.

Pendant que je faisais le portrait de M. de Beaujon, je voulus visiter son bel hôtel, que j'avais toujours entendu citer pour sa magnificence: aucun particulier, en effet, n'était logé avec autant de luxe, tout était d'une grande richesse et d'un goût exquis. Un premier salon renfermait des tableaux à effet, dont aucun n'était fort remarquable, tant il est aisé de tromper les amateurs, quelque prix qu'ils puissent mettre à leurs acquisitions. Le second était un salon de musique: grands et petits pianos, instruments de toute espèce, rien n'y manquait; d'autres pièces, ainsi que les boudoirs et les cabinets étaient meublées avec la plus grande élégance. La salle de bain surtout était charmante; un lit, une baignoire étaient drapés, comme les murailles, en belle mousseline à petits bouquets, doublée de rose; je n'ai jamais rien vu d'aussi joli; on aurait aimé à se baigner dans cette salle. Les appartements du premier étage étaient meublés avec autant de soin. Dans une chambre entre autres, qui était ornées de colonnes, on avait placé au milieu une énorme corbeille dorée et entourée de fleurs, qui enfermait un lit, lit dans lequel personne n'avait jamais



Figure 8

³⁸ *Mémoires secrets*, London, 1787, IX, pp. 46ff.

³⁹ Beaujon is not listed in the *Almanachs royaux* nor in Colleville & Saint-Christo; but he does appear in Meslin, *Mémoires historiques concernant l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis*, Paris, 1785, p. 217, from which it appears that he was appointed Trésorier triennal on 6 March 1771, in succession to Bergeret, but resigned almost immediately, being replaced by de Selle and, two years later, by Baudard de Sainte-James.

couché. La façade de l'hôtel donnait sur le jardin qu'on pouvait, vu son étendue, appeler le parc, qu'un habile architecte avait dessiné, et une énorme quantité de fleurs et d'arbres verts embellissaient ce parc.

Il me fut impossible de parcourir cette délicieuse habitation sans donner un soupir de pitié à son riche propriétaire, et sans me rappeler une anecdote que l'on m'avait contée peu de jours avant. Un Anglais, jaloux de voir tout ce que l'on citait comme curieux à Paris, fit demander à M. de Beaujon la permission de visiter son bel hôtel. Arrivé dans la salle à manger, il y trouva la grande table dressée, ainsi que je l'avais trouvée moi-même, et, se retournant vers le domestique qui le conduisait: "Votre maître, dit-il, doit faire une bien excellente chère? – Hélas! Monsieur, répondit le cicerone, mon maître ne se met jamais à table, on lui sert seulement un plat de légumes." L'Anglais passant alors dans le premier salon: "Voilà du moins ce qui doit réjouir ses yeux, reprit-il en montrant les tableaux. – Hélas! Monsieur, mon maître est presque aveugle. – Ah! dit-il l'Anglais en entrant dans le second salon, il s'en dédommage, j'espère, en écoutant de la bonne musique. – Hélas! Monsieur, mon maître n'a jamais entendu celle qu'on fait ici, il se couche de trop bonne heure, dans l'espoir de dormir quelques instants." L'Anglais, regardant alors le magnifique jardin qui se déployait sous ses fenêtres: "Mais alors, votre maître peut jouir du plaisir de la promenade. – Hélas!! Monsieur, il ne marche plus." Dans ce moment arrivaient les personnes invitées à dîner, parmi lesquels se trouvaient de fort jolies femmes. L'Anglais reprend: "Enfin, voilà plus d'une beauté, qui peuvent lui faire passer des moments très agréables?" Le domestique ne répondit à ces mots que par deux hélas! au lieu d'un, et n'ajouta rien de plus.

M. de Beaujon était très-petit et très-gros, sans aucune physionomie; M. de Calonne, que j'ai peint en même temps, offrait son parfait contraste, et les deux portraits se trouvant exposés chez moi, l'abbé Arnault, qui les vit à côté l'un de l'autre, s'écria: "Voilà précisément l'esprit et la matière."

M. de Beaujon avait été le banquier de la cour sous Louis XV, et ses opérations financières furent toujours si habiles qu'avant sa vieillesse il possédait déjà des millions. Il faut dire à sa louange qu'il dépensa en bonnes œuvres une grande partie de son immense fortune; jamais un malheureux ne s'est adressé vainement à lui, et l'hôpital du faubourg du Roule recommande encore aujourd'hui son nom comme celui d'un bienfaiteur de l'humanité.

Mme Vigée Le Brun's dismissal of the picture collection is consistent with the contempt she shows for the nouveaux riches fermiers généraux, but at least she indicates greater sympathy for her client than she did for Baudard de Sainte-James. Her own records include three portraits of Beaujon, one in 1784, and two the following year, one of which is "pour son hospice". It is not clear which each of these is, nor whether the price of 8000 livres was for one or more. Since the artist was used to working in her own studio and went to the Hôtel d'Evreux only by special command, it is logical to believe (as Joseph Baillio now suggests, in private correspondence confirming the attribution and identification, June 2002) that the pastel was the first, and primary, image, made in 1784, from which the main painting was finished, in 1785; and a repetition was ordered later that year. On one of these she placed the plans of the hospice close to its founder; Beaujon, it is said from modesty, pleaded with her to paint these out, and send his valet de chambre with a purse of 30 louis to compensate for this extra trouble.⁴⁰

That same modesty, or more accurately an intense introspection, may well have informed the choice of the dramatic pose: body, head and eyes are all full on, fixing the viewer with a piercing directness which is almost never found in *ancien régime* portraiture – except in Perronneau, where it is one of his favourite tricks. Perhaps this influenced the Goncourts in their misattribution. In early Renaissance portraiture, monarchs were shown in profile in order to maintain an appropriate emotional distance between sitter and subject, a tradition which remains in the heads of sovereigns on coins and stamps. But while nobles and commoners have been shown at every angle in between, the totally symmetric full-face portrait has always, in Western art, been something of a taboo – a pose reserved for the Christ of the *vera icon*, used, entirely conventionally, in the *Salvator Mundi* now given to Leonardo,⁴¹ as well as, shockingly, by Dürer in his Munich self-portrait of a similar date. Today, even in photography, it is associated with passports and criminals' mug shots. It is not so much a pose as an unmediated absence of pose – whether conveying the divine, the forensic or the confessional. The dramatic image of

⁴⁰ Cited Jean Chatelus, *Peindre à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Nîmes, 1991, p. 250.

⁴¹ See Luke Syson's discussion in the exhibition catalogue *Leonardo da Vinci: painter at the court of Milan*, London, National Gallery, 2011.

Beaujon, entirely devoid of the flattery usually associated with Vigée Le Brun, is of a man making amends not only by his gift of the hospice, but by his display of unparalleled candour and humility.

Beaujon died the following year, in the hôtel d'Evreux (which he has sold to Louis XV in August 1786 for 1.1 million livres, slightly more than he had paid, subject to a life interest).⁴² The author of the *Mémoires secrets* reported the event almost neutrally:

M. Beaujon, le Crésus de nos jours, qui végétait depuis longtemps sans être guère plus que sexagénaire, vien de mourir *enfin*, et l'on ne parlerait plus de lui s'il n'avait laissé un monument de bienfaisance à perpétuité: c'est un hospice de charité, dont, afin de mieux assurer la durée, il confie l'inspection et l'administration au président de Lamoignon, et à sa famille après lui, tant qu'elle subsistera, dans un certain ordre. Il accompagne ce titre d'honneur d'un legs plus lucratif de 50,000 livres de rente.⁴³

Mme d'Oberkirch returned to her subject, comparing his fate with that of Baudard de Sainte-James shortly after his death and drawing a parallel with King Midas:

Ces financiers si fameux et si prodigues ont presque tous eu le même sort...M. Beaujon me paraît le type d'un malheur incomparable. Qu'y a-t-il de plus terrible que cet homme comblé des dons de la fortune, ne pouvant jouir d'aucun, ne trouvant pas une minute de sommeil sous des lambris dorés, sous des courtines de damas des Indes, ne pouvant marcher dans les jardins les plus enchatneurs, ne pouvant supporter même ses carrosses doublés de satin et moelleusement ballottés sur des ressorts anglais, réduit à manger du gruau à l'eau pendant que sa table était couverte des mets et des vins les plus recherchés, enfin, entouré des plus jolies femmes de la cour, qu'on appelait ses berceuses, auxquelles il ne pouvait adresser que quelques mots de galanterie insignifiante? Il me fait absolument l'effet de ce personnage de la fable pour lequel tout ce qu'il touchait se changeait en or. Je l'ai plaint bien davantage qu'un malheureux manquant de tout.⁴⁴

Beaujon was buried temporarily in his parish church, but the remains were transferred to his chapelle Saint-Nicolas a few months later, when it was completed; they were exhumed during the Revolution. As we have seen, only some of his collection was sold at auction, but records of the remainder do not seem to have survived. However, of the three versions, the artist retained one for her own collection, and it was seen in her salon by Virginie Ancelot⁴⁵ at some stage towards the end of her life (after 1830). The full length oil destined for the hospice was almost certainly destroyed during the revolution, and the oil reproduction made to specific order would also have gone to Beaujon or a third party; so the version Vigée Le Brun retained was most likely the pastel. Only a few years after her death in 1842 Dr Aussant acquired this sole surviving version of a portrait which, as Joseph Baillio points out, would rank among the artist's masterpieces alongside her portrait of Calonne, "l'une des gloires du portrait officiel du règne de Louis XV."

Neil Jeffares

⁴² His death certificate, reproduced in Jal, lists his offices as "conseiller d'État, trésorier honoraire de l'ordre royal et militaire de St Louis, receveur général des finances de la généralité de Rouen et marguillier d'honneur de cette paroisse [de la Madeleine, Paris]". His will, 10 January 1787, is in the AN Y62 fol. 62; among the more unusual bequests was 20,000 livres to a certain Marie Beaujon of Montauban who for some time had claimed to be a relative (cited Boshier, *op. cit.* 1987, p. 30).

⁴³ *Mémoires secrets*, 21 December 1786, xvii, p. 286.

⁴⁴ *Mémoires...*, p. 656.

⁴⁵ Virginie Ancelot, *Les Salons de Paris*, Paris, 1858, p. 41. The picture was not however in her posthumous inventory (I am again indebted to Joseph Baillio; private communication, October 2010).