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Hyacinthe Rigaud's Portrait of Gaspard de Gueidan

Art and Aristocratic Politics during the Ancien Régime

*The man of the world lives entirely in his mask;
what he really is, is of no importance;
what he appears to be is everything to him. –*

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*

“The portraitist has no trouble keeping food on his table; that is to say that there is not one wealthy bourgeois not being coquettish enough to want to own a portrait of herself.”¹ What this witty observer of the contemporary French art scene in 1728 ironically attacks here reflects the ambivalent position of portraiture in the eighteenth century. Quantitatively meaningful, it nevertheless occupied only a middling position in the academic hierarchy of genres. Particularly with the attempts of the incipient neoclassical style to leave the subjects of the time behind (which were considered frivolous) did the number of people grow who accused portraiture of enjoying an undue boost in popularity, especially compared to history painting. The public administration of art felt compelled to compensate for the private penchant by officially limiting its promotion.² Ultimately, however, this had little effect. The rift between normative art-theoretical parameters and the needs of consumers grew larger and larger. In the nineteenth century, the salons were decked out with with more or less meaningless portraits, while criticism of the genre rose ad nauseam. Towards the middle of the century, the production of photorealistic portraits reached industrial proportions.

This article discusses a particular portrait from the eighteenth century; a portrait that – according to the thesis presented here – virtuously uses the ar-

1 Richelet, *Dictionnaire*, vol. 2, 453. Original: “C’est un Peintre [...] qui s’applique seulement à faire des portraits, & qui y gagne de quoi bien faire bouillir son pot, parce qu’il n’y a point de bourgeoisie un peu coquette & un peu à son aise qui ne veuille avoir son portrait.”

2 Conisbee, *Painting*, 111.

tistic instruments of great painting, such as the ability to convey expression known to classical pictorial language. The question of the cultural and sociohistoric importance of portrait painting, in the broadest sense of the term, will be raised. Here, portrait painting is analysed primarily with regard to its representational character in the context of the early modern political system.

1. The Portrait and its Painter

Hyacinthe Rigaud's portrait of Gaspard de Gueidan (146,5 × 113,7 cm), housed today at the Musée Granet in Aix-en-Provence, is a late work from the extensive body of portraits by the most important portrait painter of the *Ancien Régime* (Illustration 1). Since the late seventeenth century, Rigaud, born in 1659, had established himself as an artist who helped raise the courtly classical portrait to its paradigmatic mode of appearance. With his portrait of the aristocrat Gueidan from Southern France, painted in 1734/35 towards the end of his career (†1743), he managed to attach himself to the Rococo style of portrait painting. He combined bright and shining coloration with a flattening of the formal vocabulary, which had been prepared in the painting of the *Régence*. The result is exceptional: Norman Bryson considers this portrait to be one of the most breathtaking specimens of French eighteenth century painting. He even considers it one of the four or five radically underappreciated masterpieces of French art of all time.³ I would like to disregard for the time being the formal character of the portrait in order to emphasise a content-related aspect.

Visible at first glance is the fact that this three-quarter-length portrait is not a mere portrait, but rather a role-portrait – a so-called *portrait historié*.⁴ In the late Baroque era, it was championed by Nicolas de Largillierre and Jean Marc Nattier in particular and – in the realm of the classical hierarchy of genres – had the decisive advantage of being elevated to the ranks of a historical painting. The character depicted is not captured standing still, but rather in an implied movement proceeding from left to right. In his *Cours de peinture par principes*, Roger de Piles, an influential figure of the French Rococo era, considered this implied moment of action to be particularly difficult to compose, due to the highly complex treatment of the garment it required.⁵ This is joined by another motif: The subject of the

3 Bryson, *Word and Image*, 100ff.

4 Wishnevsky, *Studien*.

5 Piles, *Cours*, 277.



Illustration 1: Hyacinthe Rigaud, Portrait of Gaspard de Gueidan.

portrait holds a *musette* in his hands, a descendent of the traditional bagpipe, with the air supply not being regulated by a blowpipe, but rather by the compression of a bellows. He is accompanied by a dog, stretching upwards towards him.

The accessories clarify the portrait's semantic field: Dog and *musette* characterise the portrayed person as a shepherd, a motif that is accompanied by the bucolic landscape depicted in the background. In addition, the imaginatively coloured floral print, sumptuous silk and brocade garment held in iridescent gold, brown, red and blue tones, has been addressed as a shepherd costume. In his *livre de raison*, Rigaud himself refers to this painting, for

which he obtained the premium price of 3000 livres as “M. de Gueidan en habit champêtre”.⁶ Clearly a decidedly stylised concept of shepherding is applied here, and it is nearly superfluous to point out the meaning of the pastoral and bucolic aesthetics for the courtly culture of France and above all for the culture of the *Régence* and the Rococo. One need only consider Watteau. However, it does seem important to recall the function of pastoral aesthetics in the late Louis XIV era in France.

Several years ago, this function was once again elaborated in Thomas Crow's superb book about *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris*.⁷ In connection with Norbert Elias's theory of court society,⁸ Crow refers to the escapist and nostalgic nature of shepherd mythology for an aristocratic society that had been cast under the spell of the absolutistic king. Though modern research has shown the limits of Elias' approach with regard to the nature of the absolutistic monarchy, at stake here is the aristocracy's self-perception, which tended to be sceptical about its own influence. Via the shepherd lifestyle, the court-nobility of Versailles recalled their imaginary independence from the central authority. The rural character of the pastoral aesthetics, the autonomy of the lords, which in the course of centralizing modernization had partly been lost for the traditional aristocracy since the sixteenth century at the latest, expressed melancholy. The fact that this rural culture was joyously resurrected specifically at a time when the power of the centralising authority of the absolute monarch was dwindling, following the death of the Sun King as well as during the two preceding decades, is unmistakable. The artistic composition of simple rural life was the subject of almost fifty eclogic theories in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁹ Subsequently, it developed into something considered original and authentic, and was pitted against the depravation of the court by the French philosophers of Enlightenment.

What insight do these very general references provide with respect to Rigaud's portrait of Gueidan? More importantly, who was this Gaspard de Gueidan who had himself portrayed as a shepherd?

6 Rosenfeld, *Largillierre*, 306.

7 Crow, *Painters*. Cf. for Dutch art the study of McNeill Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia*.

8 Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft*. It is unclear, however, why Crow (as in note 7) believes that he must distance himself from Elias in his central thesis, as he develops an identical interpretation of the sociohistorical dimension.

9 Werner-Fädler, *Arkadienbild*, 65.

2. Gaspard de Gueidan's Rise to Aristocratic Grandeur

We know that Gaspard was born into a bourgeois family, originally from Reillanne in the Haute-Provence department of France, who earned their money through trade.¹⁰ In the mid-seventeenth century, Gaspard's grandfather purchased a position in the *Chambre des Comptes*, one of the administrative divisions that, long before the reign of Louis XIV, had served to economise and unify the country. The French kings often appointed members of the bourgeoisie to this board. At the same time, these positions were an opportunity for the bourgeoisie to slowly make their way into the nobility. The first step on this arduous path was made by the Gueidan family as well. The person portrayed here by Rigaud, had in particular concentrated all his thoughts and wishes on securing this status, even if it meant resorting to absolutely objectionable means. Born in 1688, Gaspard entered into the parliament of Aix-en-Provence, being broadly responsible for jurisprudence as *avocat général*. In this way he continued down the path laid by his grandfather and became a member of an institution that increasingly saw its role as a defender of elite interests.

For the interpretation of this Rigaudian portrait it is important to know that, at the time of its creation, Gaspard had reached the first peak of his influence. In 1734, his father declared him the sole heir of his possessions, after his son Jean, Gaspard's brother, had died at an early age, leaving the post of vicegerent of the family vacant.¹¹ In the late 1730s, the speeches Gaspard held in parliament were printed¹², which earned him a certain reputation and gave reason for hopes – though they proved to be false – of being elected into the *Académie française*. Instead, he had to be content with a position in the *Académie de Marseille* which, however, in no way deterred his conviction of being an exceptional intellectual. Finally, in 1740 he received one of the most prestigious offices in parliament, that of the *président à mortier*. With this, Gueidan had achieved more than originally hoped for. Shortly after the assumption of the family fortune, around the time the portrait was painted, however, he changed his advancement strategy and initiated a sort of genealogical improvement of his family. Already in 1737 the Lord of Gueidan proposed to have his property in Valabre declared a *fief* by the King. He thought of a medieval-style *feodum*, in which purely material rights of ownership should be raised to seigniorial basic rights. This initially abstruse-looking ef-

10 For this and the following: Roux, "La famille de Gueidan"; Cubells, *La Provence des lumières*, 42 ff. and 96 ff.

11 Roux, "La famille de Gueidan", 25.

12 Guéidan, *Discours*.

fort was prevented at first by the cities' resistance against refeudalisation.¹³ It fits perfectly to the image of a new nobleman who wanted to put on airs of the old nobility. It was also consistent with the widespread ambition, particularly in Provence, of a *noblesse de robe*, to imbue oneself with the distinction of a *noblesse d'épée*. This ambition was also depicted in the coat of arms that Rigaud placed on the *musette*. In the long run, the appeal of the state was of little significance because later a *fief* is mentioned. In 1752, its owners were even able to expand into a veritable *marquisat*, granted by a king who explicitly mentioned the family's merits gained in the medieval crusades.¹⁴ As a result, Gueidan became a *marquis* and a seigniorial landowner.¹⁵

Employment in parliament was rather impedimentary to such self-ennoblement. Parliament, after all, stood for royal officialdom, dirty money and increasingly for the humble-born. It is true that the old assumption that originally the parliament had been a bourgeois institution has been challenged over the last few decades.¹⁶ For Provence, however, a detailed examination of the parliamentary nobility of the eighteenth century showed that on average this group had far shallower roots than the nonparliamentary nobility. In particular, hardly anyone in this category – also as opposed to the nonparliamentary nobility – could refer to ancestors of knightly nobility in the Middle Ages.¹⁷

In the 1730s, and paradoxically even more so after his election as *président à mortier*, Gueidan began to withdraw from the parliament and to indulge in a purely aristocratic intellectual culture. This is tied to the *dégoût de la robe*, which was not only expressed by those of higher standing, but also by those of the robe themselves, who hoped in this way to improve their standing.¹⁸ With very limited proof, he convinced the genealogists of his ancestry's status in the Middle Ages as military nobility. He also wrote to one of them who was curious as to the fact that Gueidan, in his obviously manipulated family history, had not even mentioned his grandfather's work in the *Cours des Comptes*: "Since we are in no way of the *robe*, such offices to which others would attribute their honour would only serve to cast a shadow on the re-

13 Roux, "Le domaine de Valabre", 111. Cf. Emmanuelli, "La vie politique".

14 Achard, *Dictionnaire*, vol. 1, 385ff.; Roux, "La famille de Gueidan", 29; Moreri, *Le grand dictionnaire*, vol 5, 424

15 Incidentally, some of his former bourgeois colleagues in parliament followed a similar path. With their seigniorial self-confidence they were involved in altercations with the reluctant population, which were documented in many cases. Cf. e.g. Cubells, "Un agronome aixois".

16 Cf. e.g. Goubert, *L'Ancien Régime*, 165.

17 Cf. Cubells, *La Provence des lumières*, 40ff. On the general artistic situation see Boyer, "La peinture".

18 Gaspard himself experienced this "dégout de la robe". Cf. Cubells, *La Provence des lumières*, 96.

noun my ancestors achieved through military service.”¹⁹ Gueidan traced his lineage back to the Counts of Forcalquier and therewith to a family that – as a sign of utmost nobility – had even fought in the Crusades.²⁰ Here, the bourgeois tradesmen-ancestors had, of course, to be elided as much as possible. Furthermore, it is said that Gueidan ordered the insignia of his presidency to be removed. These were destined to adorn the family mausoleum in Reillanne, which, significantly, had been conceived shortly after the death of Gueidan's father – a genuine case of historical misrepresentation.²¹ This is just one example of Gaspard's self-styling. In this light, he bears a dangerously striking resemblance to the idiotic social climber Jourdain, to whom Molière dedicated the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, one of his loveliest satires. The efforts Gaspard had to make to get his children into the Sovereign Military Order of Malta alone are quite revealing.

Incidentally, the era of the parliamentary Gueidans came to an end with Gaspard. In 1766 he sold his position as *président à mortier* and consequently did not appoint any of his children as successor in this *Cours*. In a further attempt to substantiate their nobility, Gaspard commissioned a series of portraits of his family members from some of the most important painters of the time. A particularly striking example is the portrait of his son Pierre Secret de Gueidan by the local painter Claude Arnulphy. Here, the subject is not only decorated with the medal of the Sovereign Military order of Malta, but is presented with an almost royal air (Illustration 2).²² Just as Gaspard's ancestors of the Forcalquier family had allegedly done, his eight-year-old son is already represented fighting the enemies of Christianity.²³ That what the commentator on portrait fashion, cited at the beginning of this article, applied to the vain bourgeois could be applied here to the former bourgeois even more – one might even go as far as to accuse him of delusions of grandeur.

19 “C'est que, n'étant point ce qu'on peut appeler une famille de robe, ces charges, dont tous les autres se honoreront, ne serviraient qu'à tenir la gloire que mes aïeux se sont acquise dans les armes.” See Roux, “La famille de Gueidan”, 28.

20 This found its way into coeval genealogical special literature, for example, Achard, *Dictionnaire; Ventre (Artefeuil)*, *Histoire héroïque*, 535. Incidentally, the Artefeuil had already appeared in a version that truthfully described the offices of Gaspard's ancestors. The ambitious viceregent had the circulation of this version banned. Cf. Roux, *La “famille de Gueidan”*, 39.

21 Billioud, “Le mausolée”.

22 Here, one must remember that since the seventeenth century the nobility's primary interest in art was limited primarily, if not exclusively, to the portraits they commissioned of their respective family members. Cf. Terlay, “Portrait”, 6f.; cf. also Dewald, *The European Nobility*, 160; Bray, *La préciosité*, 125 and 189.

23 The aforementioned mausoleum was also adorned with battle scenes that seem to refer to battles his ancestors fought in the Holy Land.



Illustration 2: Claude Arnulphy, Portrait of Claude Secret de Gueidan as knight of the Maltese order.

3. The Pastoral Theme and Noble Self-Fashioning in Absolutist France

This brings us back to our point of departure. The question is whether Rigaud's portrait can be seen as a piece of the jigsaw of this provincial social climber's self-styling, whose desire to be part of the nobility – typical for the eighteenth century – should have become apparent. Actually, in this context there is a subtle strategy to gain a more precise understanding of this role

portrait, which for the time being researchers have only been partly able to identify. A theory that has often been suggested but not yet commented upon is that Gaspard de Gueidan is portrayed here in the role of Céladon from Honoré d'Urfé's novel *Astrée*.²⁴ The fact that our protagonist carefully chose this role because of its sociopolitical function has, for the time being, been overlooked.

Céladon is one of the main characters of this novel, written between 1607 and 1627 by a member of the high nobility. Originally from Provence himself, Urfé later lived in his château in Forez near Lyon. It is utterly impossible to even attempt to briefly outline the – by modern standards – positively abstruse plot lines of this nearly 5000-page long novel. The framework of this labyrinthine arrangement, however, is the story of Céladon's love for Astrée; her refusal of this love constitutes the work's leitmotiv. Devastated that his beloved one does not answer his affection, Céladon hurls himself into the Lignon River. He then wanders through the valleys and forests of Southern France where Urfé set his story. The much adored Astrée, as a goddess of justice who has returned to Earth, gives the landscape around the Lignon river the appearance of a modern day Arcadia. Céladon's affection is not even lessened by the advances of Galathée the Nymph. In the novel, Galathée, who lives at the neighbouring court of the female ruler Amasis, serves as a symbol of courtly society.

The image of Gueidan in Rigaud's portrait can easily be seen as a reference to the narrative configuration in the novel. In the historical illustrations of the novel, Céladon is occasionally shown accompanied by a dog and, like Gueidan, carries a haversack.²⁵ At the same time, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the specific movement of the dog is a slight reference to the tradition of the status portraits of the high nobility, as can be seen, for example, in Titian's portrait of Charles V painted in 1533 (Illustration 3). Furthermore, figures holding bagpipes also appear in the illustrations.²⁶ A closer look at the portrait reveals that many details become clearer with the novel's plot in mind. The landscape in the background with the river is not just any bucolic landscape, but rather a reference to the Lignon River – the place where the protagonist attempts suicide – which plays a significant role in all of the historical renarrations of the novel as well as in the aforementioned illustrations. Even the implied movement of the protagonist of the portrait can be explained if one takes into account that Céladon, who con-

24 Rosenfeld, *Largillierre*, 305; Conisbee, *Painting*, 117; also Mirimonde, *L'iconographie musicale*, 60ff.

25 d'Urfé, *L'Astrée* (frontispiece of the 5th volume, illustration of the 1628 edition).

26 Ibid., Vol.3, part 3, book 5, edition 1733 ("Bergers et bergères dans une des salles de la demeure d'Adamas jouent d'instruments divers").



Illustration 3: Titian, Emperor Charles V. with dog.

siders himself a descendant of the Knights of the Round Table,²⁷ becomes a paradigmatic seeker. Constantly worshiping his beloved one (who rejects him), he cannot rest and so offers his homage through the longingly melancholy sound of the *musette*.

Astrée's influence continued even a hundred years after its completion, and in 1733, a year before the creation of Gueidan's portrait, it was republished with illustrations by Gravelot and read throughout Europe. How can *Astrée's* importance be understood? One would be correct in saying that, with *Astrée*, Urfé made the greatest contribution to the civilisation and sophistication of the French aristocracy, which at the beginning of the seventeenth century still appeared comparatively provincial.²⁸ The ideal of *honnêteté*, by which the nobility aspired to define their prominent position, seems to go back to the behavioural models in *Astrée*; the shepherd's community in the novel is nothing more than a masked noble society. In 1650, Roland Desmarets wrote, "I would like our youth, and above all our noble youths, to never set this book aside, so that they may learn elegance and 'urbanité des moeurs'."²⁹ The worship of the beloved one, whose Platonizing ideality is unmistakably attached to the medieval concept of courtly love, is a central element of this notion of *honnêteté*.³⁰ It forms the culture of aristocratic society, whose members cultivate themselves in the *précieuses'* salons of the mid-century. It is in this notion of *honnêteté* that the nobility, who distanced itself from the absolutist King, cultivated their traditions and values.³¹ Depicting characters as the characters of this novel in literary as well as painted portraits was common practice; it is no wonder that such works influenced the pastoral portraiture of the late Baroque style as well.³²

Norbert Elias conducted extensive research on the central role of *Astrée* in noble culture. He discovered the ambivalent attitude of a class that, on the one hand, tried to advance in the social ranks of the court, but on the other regarded this court as alienating it from their ancestral role.³³ In fact, the novel itself clearly criticizes the court, as may be seen by the critical descrip-

27 Horowitz, *Honoré d'Urfé*, 75.

28 Reure, *La vie*, 276ff., also Dewald, *The European Nobility*, 158.

29 "Je voudrais que notre jeunesse, et surtout notre jeunesse noble, ne quittât jamais son livre, pour y apprendre l'élégance et l'urbanité de moeurs." From Reure, *La vie*, 304.

30 Stanton, *The Aristocrat*, 137.

31 Reure, *La vie*, 278ff. Cf. also Blunt, "The Précieux".

32 Reure, *La vie*, 279. In contrast, the influence of *Astrée* on the visual arts in the 17th century was more limited. Cf. *Ibid.*, 281; Schnéegans, *Notes*, 57ff.

33 Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft*, 320ff. D'Urfé, who incidentally had a strained relationship with Henry IV himself, clarified that the ancestors of the characters in his novel come from high social circles. They had, however, given up courtly life in order to live noble lives without pressure from the outside. Cf. Horowitz, *Honoré d'Urfé*, 19f. and 96; Ehrmann, *Un paradis*, 88 and 106.

tions of Amasis' court.³⁴ Accordingly, Crow sees the continued popularity of the novel – even in the early eighteenth century – as evidence of efforts to gain aristocratic autonomy. However, actually he demonstrated his attitude only by the example of Watteau.³⁵ He shows particular interest in those classes as not having a long family history and attempting to gain their status by way of aristocratic codes. The parallels to the Gueidan family are obvious. In view of this, the fact that the type of history-fantasy novel adored by *les précieuses*, to which *Astrée* belonged, is directly contrary to neoclassical rule-governed poetics is of historic-cultural importance. Contrary to Boileau's belief that the *précieuse* subject matter was dead for good, it experienced a renaissance after 1690 and virtually inundated the country in the early eighteenth century.³⁶ This too is a sign of the resurrection of an artistic genre opposed to the absolutistic attempt to centralise society and taste.³⁷

In the course of this briefly outlined development, the *musette* became a paradigmatic musical instrument of the pastorally inclined aristocracy. On the one hand, it served as a reminder of the quasi-precivilised state of the preabsolutist, aristocratically influenced Middle Ages to which Gueidan pledged himself as evidenced by his attempt at feudalisation. On the other hand, compared to the bagpipe, it was so sophisticated that it met the standards of courtly decorum. Flute instruments were originally eclipsed in (Italian) courtly circles by string instruments,³⁸ because the physical exertion of playing them was too easily seen on the faces of the players. The specific method of operation of the *musette*, however, spared the noble musician such embarrassing deformations. In this way, the instrument became the main element of the *arcadian revival* in Louis XIV's court.³⁹ The golden era of this instrument lies between the 1720s and the 1730s, with the appearance of the Hotteterre family, who became famous throughout Europe as *musette-virtuosi*.⁴⁰ Art historians are most familiar with it as a common attribute in Antoine Watteau's *fêtes galantes*.

Thus, Rigaud's combination of Gueidan's portrait and the *Astrée* tradition would be justified by the patron's intention to inscribe himself into an aris-

34 Gaume, *Les inspirations*, 275 ff.

35 Crow, *Painters*, 68 ff. Cf. also Freedman, *The Classical Pastoral*, 133; Skrine, *The Baroque*, 49; Maland, *Culture and Society*, 50 ff.; Bochet, *L'Astrée*, 106.

36 Cherel, "De Télémaque", 115; also MacMahon, *Aesthetics*, 121 ff.

37 Cf. Bray, *La préciosité*, 103 ff. Jean Jacques Rousseau, for example, was an avid reader of *Astrée*. The novel supposedly inspired his revolutionary theory of natural law. Cf. Klemperer, *Geschichte*, 33.

38 Held, *Caravaggio*, 39 ff.

39 Leppert, *Arcadia*, 35; Baines, *Bagpipes*; Freedman, *The Classical Pastoral*, 168; Mirimonde, *L'iconographie musicale*, 60 ff.; Flood, *The Story*, 123 ff.; Winternitz, *Musical Instruments*, 81.

40 Flood, *The Story*, 123 ff.

tocratic tradition into which he was not born, where he nevertheless wanted to further advance. In this regard, the notion of *honnêteté* may have been of particular importance to him because, as an ideal based on accomplishment and virtue, it differed from the courtly ideals and accepted also the bourgeoisie in its exclusive circle.⁴¹ Moreover, the nonconformist noble culture influenced by *les précieuses*, now considered the court-nobility to be materialistic, self-serving and grabby.⁴² This is also reflected in the constellation in *Astrée*: The court-nobility is represented by Amasis' morally ambiguous nymphs, whereas the shepherds represent both the civilised bourgeoisie and nobility, who merge together against the background of a mutual ideal of virtue.

4. The Countryside as an Aristocratic Alternative to "Court and King"

Subject matter from *Astrée* can occasionally be found in the portraiture of the early eighteenth century.⁴³ One such example is Nicolas de Largillière's "Portrait of Condesa de Castelblanca in the role of *Astrée*", painted in 1712. The character is shown here with the typical *houlette*, the shepherd's staff (Illustration 4). Gueidan also commissioned similar portraits. He originally wanted to have his wife Angélique de Simiane, Madame de Gueidan, painted by Rigaud as well but Rigaud refused this commission due to overwork, suggesting his friend Largillière instead, who – apparently at the request of the protagonist herself – chose the role of Flora (Illustration 5). Flora, like *Astrée*, refers to a revitalized character of classical mythology in Urfé's novel.⁴⁴ Interesting, in the light of Gaspard's changed strategy to validate his family, is the fact that even at the beginning of his career in parliament in 1719 he had himself portrayed as a committed *avocat général* in an orator's pose – an image to which the portrait of his wife, painted a decade later, did not quite

41 Höfer/Reichardt, "Honnête-homme", 9.

42 Stanton, *The Aristocrat*, 47. The model for this attitude was Montaigne, who criticized the ignorance of the court nobility. Ibid., 22.

43 Rosenfeld, "Nicolas de Largillière's Portrait", 206. Additionally, the subject matter was interpreted in the textile art of the late eighteenth century. Cf. Desprechins, "Images de l'Astrée", 355 ff.; Desprechins, "Tapisserie royale", 147 ff.; Desprechins, "L'Astrée", 193 ff. As to the following see Rosenfeld, *Largillière*, 298 ff.

44 Rosenfeld, *Largillière*, 303. Moreover, at about the same time, Largillière seemed to have started a portrait of Gaspard which was apparently never completed. Gilbert, "Dix portraits", 376 ff. (Largillière's 7th letter). See also Rosenfeld, *Largillière*, 199 and 302; James-Sarazin, *Hyacinthe Rigaud*, 258 ff.



Illustration 4: Nicolas de Largillierre, Portrait of Marie Josephine Drummond, Condesa de Castelblanco as Astrée.

fit.⁴⁵ This is exactly documented by the artistic shift that can be traced with the help of his biography: Gueidan transformed from a legitimate public officer to the role-bearer of an imaginative literary character. In other words, he developed from a social-climbing bourgeois to a nobleman who drew his *raison d'être* from the assimilation of a *précieuse* role model of lofty aristo-

45 Billioud, "Les collections d'art", 121. With regard to the role selection from the pastoral genre, the fact that this was often filled with marriage associations may have been important. Cf. Skrine, *The Baroque*, 49. Incidentally, both portraits have exactly the same dimensions.



Illustration 5: Nicolas de Largillierre, Portrait of Angélique Simiane de Gueidan as Flora.

cratism. Initially, he concentrated on the congruence between his career and his mode of appearance, thereby following de Piles' requirements for appropriateness, who suggested the expression of "sagesse" and "intégrité" in the portrayal of the magistrate.⁴⁶ Later he hid his career, in which he no longer found satisfaction, emphasising completely different values.⁴⁷ This incident-

⁴⁶ De Piles, *Cours*, 279. Cf. de Lairese, *Le grand livre*, 169.

⁴⁷ Typically, Gaspard signed his name in parliament simply "Gueidan", otherwise, however, as "Le marquis de Gueidan, des comtes de Forcalquier." Cf. Roux, "La famille de

tally corresponds with a development that one can observe in the portrait galleries of the parliament nobility as a whole: While the representatives are presented at first by the strict simplicity of their official functions, in the course of the eighteenth century they increasingly take on the modes of appearance of classical aristocratism.⁴⁸ There are countless historical accounts of the specific ambivalence that arose from the described situation amongst the ambitious service nobility residing in Provence. As rural manorial lords, they simulated the grandeur of *vivre en noble homme* during the summer recesses. They practised knightly hospitality, the brilliance of which was due to their generally large incomes. They suffered, however, from the infamous source of their income. By wearing the red robe, they sometimes felt uncomfortably obliged to remember their bourgeois past, which the king would only do away with for the price of magisterial – in the eyes of the traditional nobility unfree – servitude.⁴⁹ Is it not possible to regard Gaspard's colourful costume in Rigaud's portrait as a compensation for the simple official garb of a royal magistrate? One should at least consider the theory that here Gueidan expressly presented himself in a role with which he distanced himself from the humble atmosphere of his municipal existence. The dominant gold-tones of his habit, which seem to have been inspired by the extensive descriptions of clothing in *Astrée*,⁵⁰ are, incidentally, clearly connoted in the minutely regulated dress code of the *Ancien Régime*.⁵¹

It was up to the *bourgeois gentilhomme*, especially in his provincial homeland, to "launder" his money by purchasing land and to advance from being a tradesman to being a, preferably feudal, owner of a large estate. The ambitious magistrates lived a country life in the nearly 800 country homes that had stood in the region around Marseille and Aix-en-Provence since the sixteenth century. With their pride in an existence on the outskirts of civilisation, far away from the royal court, they evoked an *Astrée*-inspired status, often passed on through literature. Because of their position in parliament, however, this status did not actually suit them at all, except at certain times of the year when they were free to delve entirely into the fantasy of premodern feudal grandeur.⁵²

Gaspard de Gueidan, as magistrate of the *Parlement de Provence*, did not see his role merely as the King's obedient representative. Instead, with all due respect for his master, he absolutely insisted on the independence of his

Gueidan", 40. Also noteworthy is the description of a basically comparable development in Holland by McNeill Kettering, *Gentlemen*, 41 ff.

48 Ford, *Robe and Sword*, 213 ff.

49 Bluche, *La vie quotidienne*, 110.

50 McNeill Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia*, 116.

51 Roche, *La culture*, 110.

52 Huppert, *The Bourgeois*, 95 ff.

status, thereby claiming aristocratic autonomy. The ambivalence of a parliamentarian's existence can be seen here, as it were, from its good side as well. To the court's claim that the parliaments had to show complete obedience to the monarch, Gueidan unequivocally, yet with prudent restraint, responded: "But are parliaments nothing more than instruments of the absolute monarchy? As keeper of the sacred rights of the state and of the people they must take care that none of this precious treasure be lost. (...) And the kings, who are exposed to all the interests and passions surrounding them, should kindly receive (the members of parliament's) input; the sovereign power should not refuse to be taught. (...) It is this harmony that maintains the public peace and bestows dignity upon the parliament."⁵³ This maintained the aristocratic elite's right to tell the kings what was good for the country and for themselves. Only the balance of interests between the court and the noncourtly elite, which corresponds with one of the central messages in *Astrée*, could bring forth the apostrophised harmony and the new golden era. Provence, in fact, attached great importance to an autonomous, exceptional position in the French kingdom and was fully capable of keeping the monarchy's demands of its subservience in check. In recent years, particular studies on French history have more and more carved out this fact.⁵⁴ Gaspard seems to have come to the conclusion that he could fulfil the described duty better as the King's feudal vassal than as an unfree representative in parliament.

5. The Aesthetic Language of Aristocratic Refinement

A specific form of aristocratic sophistication can also be seen in the artistic mode of appearance of the Rigaudian portrait. To date, two authors have concerned themselves intensively with the aesthetics of the painting: Hermann Bauer in an article about Rococo portraiture⁵⁵ and the aforementioned Norman Bryson in his book *Word and Image*⁵⁶. The ideas of both authors are relevant in the context of this article.

Bryson sees the central aesthetic message of the picture in the flattening of the formal vocabulary that accompanies the decisive displacement of the character in the foreground of the painting. That is to say, Gueidan is no longer organically attached to the space in the background; he neither reaches into it nor emerges from it. Instead, it is as though he has been placed in front of a screen. One might even say that the figure appears to be a living

53 Guéidan, *Discours*, vol. 1, p. 351; cf. Egret, *Louis XV*, 48 ff.

54 Emmanuelli, *Pouvoir royal*; Emmanuelli, "Pour une rehabilitation", 431 ff.

55 Bauer, *Rokokomalerei*, 127 ff.

56 Bryson, *Word and Image*, 100 ff.

person in front of a painted background. It is a lovely paradox: The living viewer confronts a painted living being who is himself positioned in front of a painted landscape. If one clearly assigns the landscape and the viewer to their respective realms of reality, the subject of the portrait somehow 'floats' between them. It seems as if he wants to meet de Piles' standards for the depiction of personalities of high birth. Such characters must appear in their attitude "as if the portrait itself speaks to us and says: stop, behold me (...)." ⁵⁷ This is easily understood if one accounts for the function of the grey silk cloak, the sumptuousness of which arches upward behind Gueidan. This rustling cloak, the movement of which is due only in part to the subject's movement and serves just as prominently as a pathos formula, shields the character from the background of the painting. It forces the character into the foremost layer and does not connect it to the surrounding space – contrary to what can be seen in the portrait of Louis XIV or in the artist's other early portraits. On the contrary, he displaces the habit and especially the *justaucorps* in the face of the viewer almost like a carpet; an enormous effort to accomplish such exquisitely painted colouration unfolds before the viewer's highly stimulated eyes. In this tour de force Bryson, though with considerable bias, sees the victory of the modern "image" over the classical "word". After all, a clear transcendence of the organisation according to the depth of the classical French portrait may be considered, and maybe even a stylistic development that parallels the restitution of the labyrinthic literary material of *précieuse*-culture of the early eighteenth century as well. Understandably, the critical eye of the enlightened viewer does not accept this effort: Several years later, Dézallier d'Argenville would criticise the fact that this aspect in fact *distracted* from the actual focal point of the painting, namely, the character's face. ⁵⁸ He therewith ushered in an era that placed a stronger emphasis on psychologisation, to which the art of portraiture was subject as well. Among other historical requirements, the debate between Reynolds and Gainsborough in England, between "grand style" and "simple style", between intellectual substance and natural disposition, repeated itself. ⁵⁹ This can be maintained, even though it has been recently shown that the dividing line between the two concepts is far less clear than previously believed. ⁶⁰

"The aristocrat as art" – here Donna Stanton refers to the volition of a member of the salon-elite to create a sort of highly stylised, artificial second-

57 "Enfin il faut que dans ces sortes d'attitudes les Portraits semblent nous parler d'eux memes, & nous dire, par exemple: Tiens, regarde-moi [...]" cf. Piles, *Cours*, 279.

58 Dézallier d'Argenville, *Leben*, 418.

59 Wind, *Humanitätsidee*, 156 ff.

60 Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*, 381 ff.



Illustration 6: Anthonis van Dyck, Portrait of Philipp, Lord Wharton.

ary ego, the nonnaturalism of which preceded the dandy, while at the same time harking back to classical aristocratism.⁶¹ Here, the name van Dyck naturally comes to mind and probably should have been mentioned already: In his three-quarter-length portrait of Philip, Lord Wharton, painted in 1632, he depicted the character with a *houlette* as a shepherd and placed him, as Rigaud did a century later, in front of a bucolic landscape (Illustration 6). At the same time, this painting serves as an excellent example of the aesthetics of *grace*. It was with the indefinable essence of such aesthetics that van Dyck

61 Cf. Stanton, *The Aristocrat*, 30.

strove to distance himself from his teacher Rubens.⁶² He added a slight s-curve to Lord Wharton's upper body, showed him with his arm loosely resting on his hip and this way provided him with the *je ne sais quoi* of the utmost sophistication. The elegance he provided the subject with was what quickly made this Dutchman the English aristocracy's favourite painter. This could also be used to describe Gueidan's attitude in Rigaud's portrait. Here, the character's implied movement disrupts the statue-like quality. The grace of his appearance is crystallised in the affected, almost effeminate placement of his hands on the instrument. When Bauer mentions the extreme and flaunted *précieuse*-quality of this concept and positions it near the caricatural, this is meant rather unspecifically.⁶³ Nevertheless, this can be understood as an indication of the extreme refinement of the aristocratic *précieuse*-society, which experienced a breathtaking revival in Rococo painting in general and specifically in Gueidan's portrait.

6. Summary

In summary, Gaspard de Gueidan came from a recently ennobled family and did everything in his power to veil this status by means of genealogic manipulation and by claiming to be a member of one of the oldest families of France. When he commissioned Rigaud, the most important portrait painter in France, he was in pursuit of a similar goal: In the role of *Céladon*, Gueidan is made part of a literary context that was assimilated by, above all, the French nobility striving for autonomy. In the novel *Astrée* a self-confidence becomes manifest that emphasises the politico-cultural role of the noncourtly nobility and shapes the specific forms of aristocratic sophistication, which even Gaspard adopted as his own.

62 Muller, "The Quality of Grace", 27 ff.

63 Bauer, *Rokokomalerei*, 128. Similarly Leppert, *Arcadia*, 117.