

. AGNEWS .

EST. 1817

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Sir Joshua Reynolds (Plympton, Devon 1723-1792 London)

Mrs Hartley as Nymph with young Bacchus

Oil on canvas

36 x 28 in. (91.4 x 71.1 cm.)



Provenance

Sir Joshua Reynolds and by descent to his niece Mary, Marchioness of Thomond (1751 – 1820); her sale, Christie's London 18 May 1821, lot 67, where purchased by Colonel Fulke G. Howard; by descent to his widow, the Hon. Mrs. Greville Howard at Ashfield Park, Surrey, until sold, Christie's London, 4 July 1874, lot 80 as "Sir J. Reynolds, Mrs. Hartley and Child – the celebrated work. Engraved by S. W. Reynolds", where purchased by Agnews for £2,520; with Agnews, by whom sold on 4 August 1874 to Richard Johnson; (possibly) collection of Capt. Walsh (according to Christie's 1928 catalogue). Mrs. R.J. Walker, Bramshott Court, Liphook, Hants; her sale, Christie's, 8 June 1928, lot 125 as "Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A. Portrait of Mrs. Hartley and Child, in slate coloured dress, with white chemisette, red sash and brown scarf; carrying her child on her right shoulder"; unsold, and by descent to the present owner.

Exhibited

(possibly) Royal Academy, 1773, no. 241
The British Institution, 1813, no .53
The British Institution, 1844, no. 159
South Kensington Museum, *The National Portrait Exhibition*, 1868, no. 810

Literature

A. Graves & W. V. Cronin, *A history of the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 4 vols, London 1899-1901, vol. 2, no. 446.
Agnews Picture Stockbook no. 4
D. Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds, A complete catalogue of his paintings*, pp.245-246, no. 854a & d.

Engraved by W. Nutter, published 14 April 1801 ("from the original picture in the possession of the Marquis of Thomond").

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Elizabeth Hartley (née White) (1750?–1824) was one of the most celebrated actors on the London stage in the 1700s. She was also notorious for the role she played in society scandals including ‘The Vauxhall Affray’. Hartley was the daughter of James and Eleanor White of Berrow, Somerset, England. She later took the name Hartley, but it is not known from whom. Various suggestions have been made including the master to whom she was a chambermaid, and other actors of a similar name. There are also no reliable sources for her early roles until she appeared in Edinburgh, on 4 December 1771, as Monimia in Thomas Otway’s *The Orphan*.

After a season in Edinburgh she moved to Bristol where David Garrick, who had heard of her remarkable beauty, commissioned the actor John Moody to attend a performance and report back to him. ‘She has a husband,’ wrote Moody in a letter to George Garrick dated 26 July 1772, ‘a precious fool, that she heartily despises’ (Garrick I, 1835, p. 476) but in fact they never actually married. In the same letter, Moody described her as having ‘a good figure, with a handsome small face, and very much freckled; her hair red, and her neck and shoulders well-turned.’ She is, he wrote, ‘ignorant and stubborn ... and has a slovenly good nature about her that renders her prodigiously vulgar.’ Nevertheless, David Garrick was impressed: ‘A finer creature than Mrs Hartley,’ he exclaimed, ‘I never saw. Her make is perfect’ (W. T. Whitley, *Artists and their friends in England 1700-1799*, 2 vols, London 1928, vol, 2, pp. 149-50).

Northcote described her, in a letter to his brother Samuel, 24 Mar. 1773, as ‘one of the most beautiful women I ever saw, and the finest figure, but [she] has not a good voice’ (Whitley, vol. 2, p. 295). She worked at the Covent Garden theatre in a numerous roles until 1780 (see below), and also appeared at Drury Lane, Liverpool and Stroud. She left the stage at the close of the season of 1779–80 when aged only 30, possibly due to ill health. She died at her home in King Street, Woolwich, and was buried in the Union Chapel. Her portrait by Angelica Kauffmann hangs in the Garrick Club; a long list of other portraits of her, mostly in character parts, is given in P. H. Highfill et alii, *Biographical dictionary of actors, managers and other stage personnel in London 1660-1800*, Carbondale, Illinois, 1973.

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The present painting is certainly listed twice as nos. 854a and 852d in Mannings's catalogue raisonne on the artist, with slightly different dimensions in each entry. These entries represent the same painting, as Mannings himself suggested might be the case. The stretcher on the reverse of the present painting has the stencil numbers 993B and 190ER as well as the chalk mark "June 8/28". These relate without question to the Christie's sales on 18 May 1821 and 8th June 1928 thereby confirming the provenance for this painting. Mannings wasn't aware of any of this at the time of his catalogue raisonne as he did not have direct access to the front and back of the painting.