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# JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S PORTRAIT OF MRS WALSINGHAM\*

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The whirlwind career of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams (1708–59) was tempered by the warm affection expressed in the letters to his two daughters. The elder daughter, Frances (1735–59), married William Anne Hollis, 4th Earl of Essex (1732–99) on 1 August 1754 and the younger daughter, Charlotte (1738–90), married the Hon. Captain Robert Boyle Walsingham (1736–79) five years later.<sup>1</sup> Their lively correspondence is in the Lewis Walpole Library at Farmington, Connecticut. A number of letters from Charlotte addressed to her father include informative reports about sitting to Joshua Reynolds in May and June 1758. The detail and informality of the correspondence provides a rare insight into eighteenth-century portrait practice.

Hanbury Williams had already had his portrait painted by Reynolds in 1756 (Neue Pinacothek, Munich) and his elder daughter had been painted by him at about the same time.<sup>2</sup> Three years later Hanbury Williams was asking his younger daughter to approach Reynolds again. In a letter to her father written at Berkeley Square on 6 May 1758 she promises to ‘... immediately execute your orders about my Picture & shall send directly to Reynolds to fix my Days & Hours in next Week for sitting to him –’.<sup>3</sup> She had been thinking about the commission as she reports to her father three days later: ‘I am to go tomorrow Morning to Reynolds to Sit for my Picture. I design to be drawn in Green & in a Negligé as I think Pictures are very Seldom So like in Fancy’d Dresses As in one’s own.’<sup>4</sup> Reynolds’s pocket book records a very busy day and the appointment for ‘Miss Williams’ is squeezed between the ten o’clock sitting of L. B. Jenkins and

Lady Caroline Seymour’s sitting at noon; the meeting can have done little more than book future appointments and outline plans for the portrait.<sup>5</sup>

The portrait must have been the subject of conversation between Charlotte Williams and her companions. Discussion had made her rethink her costume and she writes to her father with renewed enthusiasm the following Saturday: ‘I Sat to Reynolds<sup>6</sup> for the first time last Wednesday & it appears to me as if it would be very like. I have chang’d my Mind about the Dress for every Body tells me that Green will look too dismal in a Picture As the back Ground is always Dark. I therefore intend to have it in Blue which I think the Sweetest Colour in the World. I am to Sit three Times more.’<sup>7</sup>

Her next appointment at Reynolds’s studio, on Wednesday 17 May, was made for 11 o’clock and the following day she again writes to her father more wistfully than before: ‘I Sat to Reynolds for the Second Time yesterday one is no good Judge of one’s own Picture, but it appears to me as if it would be like & Reynolds Says that he is sure he shall make it Extreamly so.’<sup>8</sup> On Saturday 20 she cancelled her sitting at 11 and booked another for the same time two days later. To judge from the next letter to her father, at this appointment Reynolds must have been concentrating on painting the sitter’s head and we can assume that, at this stage at least, the portrait bore some resemblance to the unfinished oil studies of Countess Spencer.<sup>9</sup> Although there had been some discussion about the colour of the dress, surprisingly Miss Williams’s pose had not yet been determined. Nevertheless, even before the ‘attitude’ was finalised, the restless

Sir Charles was asking his daughter to chose a special frame. On 27 May Charlotte writes to her father once more,

My Dearest Papa . . . I have order'd a Famous Frame Maker to meet me at Reynolds's on Tuesday in pursuance of yr: Directions. I am sure you will be pleas'd to hear that every Body That has seen My Picture says that it is the Most Stricking Likeness they ever saw,<sup>10</sup> I am puzzled for an Attitude, Reynolds propos'd to me to be drawn playing on the Guitar, but I have some Doubts about it. I shall not determine till Tuesday Mornng: wch: is my last sitting, I will let you know by that Post what the Picture & the Frame will come to.<sup>11</sup>

The whole commission appears to have been frustrated by the sitter's uncertainty and it seems remarkable that the decision concerning the guitar should have been postponed until such a late stage. The artist must have taken a firm line and decided to portray Charlotte playing an English Guitar dressed in neither a green nor a blue 'negligé' (more commonly called a *sacque* dress or a *robe à la française*), but in a white open gown with matching petticoat. In the final painting she wears over her shoulders a blue silk shawl with a lattice pattern in white, edged with lace. Her stomacher is decorated with pleated ribbons arranged in horizontal bands, elaborate lace engageantes fall from her elbows and, complying with contemporary rococo taste, the patterned silk skirt is decorated with scalloped furberlows. She wears a string of pearls tied with a ribbon at the nape of her neck which matches her blue shawl, large round earrings, and her hair is dressed on top of her head intertwined with a string of seed pearls crowned by a blue silk pompons (Fig. 1).

According to Fanny Burney, Miss Williams's dress sense was 'violent' and when they met in 1782 she felt it worthwhile commenting upon her 'large hoop, flowers in her small and full-dressed cap, ribands and ornaments extremely shown, and a fan in her hand.'<sup>12</sup> Her accomplishment as a musician is unknown but the use of a guitar as a foil for the portraitist had been popularised by Kneller and Lely in the previous century and, perhaps fed by

Reynolds's example, notably taken up by Joseph Wright of Derby in the 1760s.<sup>13</sup> Reynolds used the device in a handful of canvases painted early in the same decade, including the portraits of Phyllis Hurrell (Minneapolis Institute of Arts), which dates from 1762,<sup>14</sup> Susannah Dingley, who was painted at about the same time,<sup>15</sup> and Miss Fordyce in a likeness of 1763 at Waddesdon.<sup>16</sup>

Charlotte Williams next sat to Reynolds on Tuesday 30 May 1758. She had hoped to see the 'Famous Frame Maker' at the same time, but he appears to have been delayed, so the meeting was rearranged for the following day.<sup>17</sup> He brought samples of his frames with him from which she could make her selection, but she was impatient and the postponed appointment had clearly irritated her as we learn from the letter written to her father on 1 June:

. . . I fully intended writing to you by Tuesday's Post as I told you I would in my last Letter to send you Word what the Picture & Frame will come to, but the Man about the Frame who I had appointed to come to me at Reynolds's disappointed me & I did not see him till yesterday Morning. The Picture is to be 20 Guineas & the Frame 4 Guineas wch: will be in all 25.£ 4.s 0:d I own I think the Frame very reasonable, for I believe it will be very pretty I saw some Models yesterday, & bespoke one that I think Very handsome. I flatter myself that the Picture will please you, but I won't say too much about it for fear it should not answer your Expectations.

I shall hurry Mr: Reynolds to finish the Drapery &c as soon as possible because I know you are impatient to see it.<sup>18</sup>

The frame presently surrounding Miss Williams's portrait appears to be the original. It is unusual in that its detailing (usually carved wood) is modelled in papier mâché and applied on to a wooden substructure.<sup>19</sup> The style of frame is not unique to Miss Williams's portrait; it was a style which met Reynolds's approval as similar commissions are mentioned in Reynolds's pocket books of 1757 and 1758.<sup>20</sup> A number of makers had brought the technique from France though only one, Joseph



Figure 1. Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of Charlotte, Mrs Walsingham* (1738–90), 1758–60, oil on canvas, 99.1 × 73cm. Private Collection, Britain. *Martyn Gregory Gallery*.

Duffour, whom Reynolds is known to have used, is referred to as 'the famous man for paper ornaments'.<sup>21</sup> The Williams frame has pierced papier mâché corners and identical pierced cartouches in the centre of each side. In comparison with the longer vertical sides, the cartouches, on the shorter sides, at the top and bottom, seem cramped and the overall effect appears ill-proportioned (Fig. 2). The design of the frame is very similar to the one surrounding Miss Denison's portrait by Thomas Hudson, which dates from the 1750s.<sup>22</sup>

Miss Williams's anxieties were resolved after her appointment at Reynolds's studio at midday on 3 June.<sup>23</sup> Free of sittings, Charlotte Williams returned to her concern about payment: her father was to meet the cost of the portrait. In a letter of 8 June to her father, perhaps in an effort to quicken his response, she sullies Reynolds's reputation for never delivering paintings without payment.<sup>24</sup> She writes:

I return you a thousand Thanks for the kind Letter I receiv'd from you yesterday, you mention in it the [sic] having enclos'd me a Bill to pay for my Picture & Frame, but there was Was [sic] No Bill enclos'd therefore I imagine you forgot it. I shall not be able to pay Reynolds before I go out of Town for I shall be gone before the Return of the Post & therefore beg you will be so good to send a Draught for 21£. to Mr Reynolds in Newport Street Leicester Fields by the next Post for he never Sends his Picture's out of his House untill he has been paid for them. So that if he receives yr: Draught by wednesday he will Send it by the Abergavenny Carrier on the Saturday following wch: is the very Day on wch: he promis'd me the Drapery shd: be finish'd. - I will take Care to pay for the Frame Myself, wch: I shall be repaid wh: I come to you.<sup>25</sup>

An incomplete note in Reynolds's pocket book written opposite the entries for Saturday 17 June 1758 indicates that the painting was nearing completion.<sup>26</sup> It seems likely that the portrait was never sent to Sir Charles's house at Coldbrooke near Abergavenny, as payment was not forthcoming. Indeed Sir Charles may not have seen the painting before his mental illness recurred, a decline so severe that he took his own life on 2 November 1759.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 2. Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of Charlotte, Mrs Walsingham* (1738–90), 1758–60, oil on canvas, 99.1 × 73cm., photographed with the frame with papier mâché decoration at the S. B. Joel sale, Christie's, 31 May 1935. Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.

No doubt with other things on her mind and lacking the frenetic drive of her father, Charlotte forgot the portrait and payment for it does not seem to have been forthcoming until June 1760.<sup>28</sup> The settlement may only have been prompted by a further sitting recorded on 16 February 1760 at 11 o'clock providing Reynolds with the opportunity to add the final touches to the canvas which had been left in store for the previous fifteen months.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless slow payment does not seem to have affected the Williams's relationship with the artist and the family continued to commission work from Reynolds.

On 16 July 1758 Sir Charles writes to Charlotte from Coldbrook: 'Pray dont forget to send your Picture to Reynolds to be copyd I hear My Dearest Essex's is almost finish'd.'<sup>30</sup> This may refer to the portrait of Sir Charles by Anton Raphael Mengs,<sup>31</sup>

which was copied by Reynolds, and to the copy of Lady Essex's 1756 portrait which is now in Watford Museum.<sup>32</sup> Shortly afterwards, perhaps a commission from Captain Walsingham whom Charlotte had married on 17 July 1759,<sup>33</sup> Sir Charles's younger daughter sat to Reynolds for a second time (Fig. 3). Presumably the differing circumstances of patronage and experience precluded the need for Mrs Walsingham to engage in a detailed correspondence concerning the commission.<sup>34</sup>

Reynolds's sensitive portraits accord with Fanny Burney's opinion of Mrs Walsingham as 'a woman high in fame for her talents, and a wit by birth, as the daughter of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams'.<sup>35</sup> After the death of her husband at sea Mrs Walsingham became well known for her eccentric behaviour and her accomplishments as a copyist. Miss Burney visited 7 Stratford Place, Mrs Walsingham's London house, in 1782. She found her hostess overbearing, as when the older lady 'kept advancing to me so near, that involuntarily I retreated from her, not knowing her design, and kept, therefore getting further and further back as she came forward, till I was stopped from any power of moving by the wainscot. I then necessarily stood still and she saluted me.' That evening the dinner guests included Sir Joshua, who was accompanied by his niece, Miss Palmer, who provided a welcome diversion for Miss Burney.<sup>36</sup> A second visit to the 'splendid house in Stratford Place' enabled her to examine the pictures which 'appear to be surprisingly well executed & [were]... chiefly copies from old pictures, or from Sir Joshua - Two were lent her from Windsor by the King himself - a Silence, a beautiful picture of Carracci, La Madonna and Child of Guido - the others are chiefly from the Devonshire Collection of Sir Joshua, she has the Fishing Boys, the Noble Angel viewing the Cross, 2 Samuels, a beautiful child, & one other I cannot recollect. She has, also, copied Gainsborough's sweet Shepherd Boy: and there are originals, by herself of Capt. Walsingham, and her son, and Miss Boyle. These are all in oils.'<sup>37</sup> It is reported that Reynolds became uneasy with the



Figure 3. Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of Charlotte, Mrs Walsingham* (1738–90), 1760, oil on canvas, 92.1 × 73cm. Sotheby's, 15 July 1992. Sotheby's.

high quality of her copies and refused to lend her any more of his pictures. She died in 1790 at the country house, Boyle Farm, which she had refurbished at Thames Ditton during her widowhood.<sup>38</sup>

Mrs Walsingham's daughter, Charlotte Boyle, inherited her mother's artistic abilities and both her mother's portraits by Reynolds were inherited by her.<sup>39</sup> In 1791 she married Lord Henry FitzGerald who assumed the additional surname of de Ros in 1806.<sup>40</sup> The 1758 portrait passed to her great-nephew, Dudley Charles, 24th Lord de Ros (1827–1907), who bequeathed the portrait to Henry Arthur Mornington, 3rd Earl Cowley who sold it in May 1912 to Leggatt Brothers.<sup>41</sup> They in turn sold it to the distinguished collector of eighteenth-century portraits, S.B. Joel, and it appeared in his sale at Christie's on 31 May 1935,<sup>42</sup> where it was bought by an American collector. It reappeared in the posthumous sale of Katherine Seymour Bullock Cole at William Doyle Galleries, New York on 29 January 1997, as lot 82, when it was purchased by a British private collector.

## NOTES

- \* The letters were discovered during a fellowship at the Lewis Walpole Library in April 1997. I should like to thank the librarian, Richard Williams, and his staff for their hospitality and kindness during my stay at Farmington. I should also like to thank Professor John Riely, Jacob Simon, Judy Egerton, Dr Aileen Ribeiro, Alan Fausel of William Doyle Galleries, Martyn Gregory and Dr David Mannings for their help in various ways.
- 1 For Hanbury Williams see Thomas Seccombe's entry in *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXI, 279–83, and Elizabeth Brooke's *The Life of Sir Charles Hanbury William, poet, wit and diplomatist*, London, 1928. The genealogical information for this paper comes from: *Burke's Landed Gentry*, 1972, III, 955 (entry Hanbury Williams); G. E. Cockayne, *Complete Peerage*, 1910–59, v, 147 (entry for Essex); *ibid.*, XI, 113–7 (entry for De Ros); *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, 1967, 901 (entry for Essex); *ibid.*, 734 (entry for De Ros); *ibid.*, 2262 (entry for Shannon); *ibid.*, 2412 (entry for Sudeley). Charlotte Hanbury Williams's husband took the additional name of Walsingham after the death of his older brother Henry, who had assumed the name and arms of Walsingham, in 1756.
  - 2 The original portrait descended to the sitter's daughter, Elizabeth, Lady Monson, and remains in the collection of her descendants [E. K. Waterhouse, 'Reynolds's Sitter Book for 1755', *Walpole Society*, XLI, 1966–8, 148].
  - 3 Yale University, Lewis Walpole Library, Hanbury Williams Papers 77–11388, p. 279 (hereafter HWP).
  - 4 The letter is dated 'Berkley Square, Tuesday morning'. HWP, 75–10846, pp. 208–9. The debate about sitters wearing contemporary or fancy dress is well known through Gainsborough's letters to Lord Dartmouth of 1771 [M. Woodall, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 2nd ed., 1963, 49–53]. They are best interpreted by A. Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, London, 1995, 26.
  - 5 London, Royal Academy Library, 1758 Pocket Book.
  - 6 The artist was not given the courtesy of a title. This together with Charlotte Williams's impatience with the frame maker (see below) bears out Fanny Burney's reference to her 'being only civil to people of birth, fame and wealth, and extremely insolent to others' [A. Dobson (ed.), *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay 1778–1840*, London, 1904, II, 145].
  - 7 The letter is dated 13 May 1758 [HWP, 75–10846, p. 155].
  - 8 HWP, 75–10846, p. 123–4.
  - 9 E. K. Waterhouse, *Reynolds*, London, 1941, 47, pl. 62b; N. Penny *et al.*, *Reynolds* (exh. cat., Royal Academy), 1986, 59, fig. 44.
  - 10 Miss Williams reaffirms this in a postscript appended to her letter written on 1 June: 'I saw yr: old Friend Mrs: Middleton the other Day who Enquir'd after you with the greatest Kindness, I took her with me to sit for my Picture wch: She thinks Extreemly like.' [HWP, 75–10846, p. 79].
  - 11 HWP, 77–11388, pp. 303–4.
  - 12 Dobson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 1904, II, 145.
  - 13 For instance, Lely's *Girl playing a Theorbo* formerly in Dr D. McDonald collection; for Kneller see J. D. Stewart, 'Kneller's Long Shadow: John Smith's Mezzotints and Joseph Wright of Derby', *Burlington Magazine*, CXVIII, June 1976, 410–3.
  - 14 The portrait is illustrated in A. Graves and W. V. Cronin, *History of the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, London, 1899–1901, I, 400.
  - 15 Last recorded in a sale at Sotheby's on 18 November 1992, lot 51 (col. repr.).
  - 16 E. K. Waterhouse, *The James A. de Rothschild collection at Waddesdon Manor: Paintings*, London, 1967, 72–3, no. 25 repr..
  - 17 Presumably this meeting did not involve Reynolds as there is no mention of it in his pocket book.
  - 18 The letter is mistakenly dated 'Berkley Square, 1 June 1757' [*sic* 1758] [HWP, 75–10846, pp. 77–8].
  - 19 The frame presently on the painting is first recorded in a photograph in the Witt Library taken when the painting was sold from the S. B. Joel collection at Christie's on 31 May 1935 (see below).
  - 20 N. Penny, 'Reynolds and Picture frames', *Burlington Magazine*, CXXVII, November 1986, 817.
  - 21 Jacob Simon, *The Art of the Picture Frame* (exh. cat., National Portrait Gallery), 1996, 40–1; Lady Llanover (ed.), *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, London, 1861, II, 532 (Mrs Delany to her sister, 17 December 1749).
  - 22 The portrait appeared at Sotheby's on 12 April 1995 as lot 44. I am grateful to Jacob Simon for discussing the frame with me and proposing this comparison.
  - 23 Reynolds's pocket book records the sitting.
  - 24 If the correspondence between Reynolds and Miss Camilla Shafto and her subsequent husband, William Adair, is typical, the artist was, if anything, lax in finalising his accounts with sitters [D. Mannings, 'Reynolds and the Shaftos: three letters and a deposition', *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXIX, November 1997, 753–5].
  - 25 HWP, 83–11393, p. 91.

- 26 The note reads: 'Miss Williams Picture to finish/to send to'.
- 27 Romney Sedgwick states that Hanbury Williams 'returned to England [in 1757] in a state of mental derangement, dying insane 2 November 1759.' [*History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, London 1970, II, 106]. Seccombe, *op. cit.*, states that the death was suicide.
- 28 Cormack's records of the payments are partial [M. Cormack, 'The Ledgers of Sir Joshua Reynolds', *Walpole Society*, XLII, 1968-70, 138]. A further payment for £30 with a note 'Kit cat 30' appears in the Ledger before 12 June 1760. A second payment for a 'head' (a term generally used to describe a 30 x 25 in. canvas) for £30 is written against the date 12 June 1760 together with a separate entry 'Recieved from Capt Walsingham' for £50. This encouraged Graves and Cronin to list a 30 x 25 in. portrait [*op. cit.*, 1027] of Mrs Walsingham instead of recording a second kit-kat sized portrait. The conclusion must be that Reynolds's Ledger is less systematic than the contemporary scholar and accountant might wish, and in this instance it is impossible to link these payments with one or other of the two portraits of Mrs Walsingham. I am grateful to Dr Mannings for providing details of the 1760 sitting and providing an interpretation of the Ledger entries.
- 29 Reynolds pocket book for 1760.
- 30 HWP, 76-11387, p. 273.
- 31 S. Roettgen, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1779 and his British Patrons* (exh. cat., English Heritage, Kenwood), 1993, 80-2 repr. col..
- 32 The replica of Lady Essex's portrait cost 12 guineas in 1760 [Cormack, *op. cit.*, 118, 151]. It was bought at the Cassiobury sale [Knight, Frank and Rutley, 15 June 1922, lot 721] by the family and given to Watford Museum by Lady Essex in 1989. I am grateful to Dr Laurie Harwood for giving me a copy of her manuscript catalogue entry about the portrait. The copy of the Mengs, which is also recorded in the ledger [*loc. cit.*, 138, 151], may also have appeared at the Cassiobury sale as lot 867 (bt Frish).
- 33 *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage* 1967, 734 (entry for De Ros); *ibid.*, 2262 (entry for Shannon).
- 34 Graves and Cronin, *op. cit.*, IV, 1432, linked a number of entries in Reynolds's pocket books in March 1777, July 1779, January 1786 and February 1788 to the portrait. David Mannings convincingly interprets these dates as social rather than professional appointments (letter to the author dated 26 February 1998). Stylistically it would appear that this portrait postdates the canvas discussed in the correspondence. The second portrait descended to the sitter's grandson, Lord de Ros, and it was sold by his descendant at Christie's on 20 November 1987, lot 95, bought in and reoffered at Sotheby's on 15 July 1992, lot 24.
- 35 Dobson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 1904, II, 144. The diary entry is dated 15 December 1782.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 145. Miss Burney reports a second dinner party with Sir Joshua as a fellow guest on 13 January 1783 [*ibid.*, 180].
- 37 *Ibid.*, 152. The Carracci and Reni (now classified as a copy) are still in the Royal Collection [M. Levey, *The Later Italian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*, London, 1964, *ibid.*, no. 432, pl. 3; no. 581]. The study of Samuel is presumably that shown at the Royal Academy in 1776 which is known in several versions [Waterhouse, *op. cit.*, 1941, 67, pl. 176b] and 'the Nobel Angel viewing the Cross' may be the figure of *Faith* used in Reynolds's design for the west window at New College, Oxford which was shown at the Academy in 1779 [M. Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures*, Cambridge, 1995, 169, pl. 66]. The others listed as by Reynolds are not identified. The Shepherd Boy by Gainsborough is the painting which was formerly in the collection of the Earl of Gainsborough and is best known through the print by Richard Earlom [John Hayes, *Gainsborough*, (exh. cat., Comune di Ferrara) 1998, no. 48 repr.]. Further insights into Mrs Walsingham's character appear in correspondence with her mother Lady Frances Williams, the Revd J. Hinchliffe and Mrs Trevor [Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, De Ros Papers, D/638 and MIC/573].
- 38 Mrs Walsingham purchased the property from the Earl of Hertford in 1783. On 4 July 1783 Mary Hamilton entered in her diary that the property comprised '42 acres of land for which, house offices, furniture, etc. she gave £5000'. Three days later Mary Hamilton wrote to Charlotte Gunning: 'Mrs Walsingham is very much pleased with this place . . . here she is sole mistress, and everything around her being her own property, it interests and amuses her' [Elizabeth and Florence Anson (ed.), *Mary Hamilton . . . Letters and Diaries*, London, 1925, 138, 140-1]. Mrs Walsingham's daughter, Charlotte Boyle, was responsible for the 'most charming' decoration of the house about which Horace Walpole remarked a number of times [W. S. Lewis (ed.), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, New Haven, 1937-83, xxxi, 251, note 4].
- 39 The children of the marriage reverted to their father's original surname (see note 1 above).
- 40 Charlotte Boyle through her descent from the George, 2nd Duke of Buckingham assumed by Royal Licence the surname and arms of De Ros for herself and her issue [*Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, 1967, 734]
- 41 Shortly before the painting was exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, in 1902/3, catalogue no. 24. The provenance is supplied in the copy of Graves and Cronin, *op. cit.*, 1899-1901, III, 1026, annotated by Ellis Waterhouse, in the Paul Mellon Centre Library.
- 42 As lot 42.