

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Grace Dalrymple Elliott

Thomas Gainsborough (British, 1727–1788)

Date ca. 1782

Medium Oil on canvas

Dimensions 30 1/8 × 25 in. (76.5 × 63.5 cm)

Credit Line Purchased by The Frick Collection, 1946

Accession Number 1946.1.153

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 7, Dining Room

Commentary Grace Dalrymple, the third daughter of Hugh Dalrymple, an Edinburgh barrister, was born about 1754 and spent the early years of her life in the home of her mother's parents, her own parents having separated. When her mother died she was sent by her father to a convent school in France. Even as a girl she was considered a beauty. One contemporary said she was "as rosy as Hebe, graceful as Venus", and another declared that "her complexion was clear as the clouds of a May morning and tinged with the roseate blush of Aurora; her disposition was lively, and her temper mild and engaging." Although her face was handsome, her figure was even more striking, for she was remarkably tall. Married at seventeen to John (afterwards Sir John) Elliott, a wealthy physician eighteen years her senior who devoted most of his time to his profession, "Dally the Tall" soon became involved in affairs with other men. After her husband divorced her in 1776, she became the mistress of the Earl of Cholmondeley, and later of the Prince of Wales. On March 30, 1782, she gave birth to a daughter, fathered, she claimed, by the Prince. Lord Cholmondeley adopted the girl, Georgiana, who was brought up and educated in his family, where she was known as Miss Seymour. Mrs. Elliott continued with various liaisons, living alternately in London and on the Continent. During the French Revolution she remained in Paris. Little is known of her life except what she recorded in her Journal, which is not always trustworthy. She was detained in the maison d'arrêt at Versailles after the fall of the Duc d'Orleans (whose mistress then she was), probably from about December of 1793 to October of 1794. While she claimed in her Journal to have been in four Paris prisons, her name is not on the register of any of them. Mrs. Elliott returned to England in January of 1798 to find that her former patrons were not pleased to see her; it is said that the Prince of Wales took steps to have her return to France. The rest of her life is obscure. Her last years were spent at Ville d'Avray, near Paris, where she died on May 16, 1823. The Frick portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy about a month after Mrs. Elliott had given birth to her daughter. Millar believes it to be the portrait referred to as "a Head of Mrs. Elliot", priced at £31 10s, in a list of pictures Gainsborough painted by order of the Prince of Wales. The hair was criticized, and Mrs. Elliott's high coloring and expression were said to denote her calling. The portrait next appeared, in 1860, at the British Institution, lent by the Duke of Portland. In his catalogue of the Portland collection, Fairfax Murray suggested that the painting was acquired in France by the fifth Duke, but the portrait may have been inherited through Mrs. Elliott's daughter, who married Lord William Charles Augustus Bentinck, son of the third Duke of Portland, and who died in 1813, thus predeceasing her mother. The only child after this union, a daughter, died unmarried. None of the early inventories of the Portland collection list the portrait of Mrs. Elliott. An earlier portrait of Mrs. Elliott by Gainsborough, showing her full-length in a yellow gown with her hair piled high on her head, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1778 (now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York). An oval portrait

thought to represent Mrs. Elliott, attributed to Gainsborough Dupont, is in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, Cheshire. Source: Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Bentinck (?). Duke of Portland, Grosvenor Square, London, and Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire. Duveen. Frick, 1946. Source: Paintings in The Frick Collection: American, British, Dutch, Flemish and German. Volume I. New York: The Frick Collection, 1968.