THE LIMNER COMPANY



WILLIAM GRIMALDI (1751 - 1830)

Portrait miniature of Georgiana (1783-1858) and Harriet (1785-1862) Cavendish, the children of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, embracing each other

Circa: 1795

1795

Watercolour on ivory (licence ZQLVUV1G)

Oval, 73 mm (2 ⅞ in) high

Inscribed verso:

'*171 (?)/ Duchess of/ Devonshire's/ Children Lady Georgiana/ and Lady Harriot/ By W: Grimaldi, …/ Painter to H…..', and with label 'From P. R. B. G. to/ P. A. B. G on her/ marriage to/ A. D. H. M. L. F. on/ 18th June 1966*.'

Papier-mâché frame with gilt-metal surround and foliate surmount

Born to Georgiana Cavendish, the Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806) and William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire (1748-1811), Georgiana and Harriet (also known as 'Little G' and 'Harryo') were the couple's only daughters and first two children, being born nine years after their marriage. Their childhood would certainly have been overshadowed by their parents' infamous ménage-a-trois with Lady Elizabeth Foster (1758-1824), who became their stepmother following their mother's death in 1806.

Georgiana and Harriet were close as sisters, and this remained the case throughout their life, though the cards they were dealt in love proved quite different. As the older sister, Georgiana was married first, to George Howard, Viscount Morpeth (1773-1848). Their match was praised, but was not simple;

Georgiana only agreed to it once her father had offered a £30,000 dowry amongst other benefits. Once married in 1801, she moved to Castle Howard in North Yorkshire, the seat of her husband's family. There she bore twelve children. It is known that she had an interest in politics, like her mother, and this characteristic was perhaps adopted from the elder Georgiana, as they had spent so much time together when she was a young girl.

The same cannot be said about Harriet, who was less favoured than her sister. Following her return from Italy, where she had given birth to an illegitimate child (Eliza Courtney), her mother is quoted as calling Harriet 'still fat', in comparison to her older sister, described as being 'very handsome'. Her marriage prospects were not as successful as her sister's. This must have been frustrating, given she did not get on with Elizabeth Foster, whose presence at Chatsworth following Georgiana the elder's death would have been inescapable. It is known that Harriet spent a lot of time staying with Georgiana the younger to avoid her.

In 1809, Harriet married Granville Leveson-Gower (1773-1846), though this match was not without complication. Much akin to other members of her family, Leveson-Gower was entangled in a love affair. This was with Harriet's aunt and namesake, Henrietta, Countess of Bessborough (1761-1821). They had been involved for over seventeen years, meaning Harriet had known him since she was a child. Despite this, they had a happy marriage, and five children. A large proportion of their time was spent in Paris, where Leveson-Gower was an ambassador.

Some confusion has resulted from the number of versions of this miniature, which is said to be taken from a portrait by Joshua Reynolds that remains untraced[1]. It is more likely that the miniature is painted after an original by Richard Cosway (1742-1821) in the Spencer Collection at Althorp[2]. Grimaldi's descendants recorded two watercolour on ivory miniatures of these children, and an identical description and inscription on the reverse allows the present work to be matched to the miniature which was found in the artist's desk upon his death in 1830. This is further supported by the initials on the back of the frame, which are historically associated with miniatures that remained within the Grimaldi Family's collection until the late twentieth century.

[1] According to the 1873 catalogue of Grimaldi's works. It should be noted that this could be wrong, as in the same entry it is said both of the children were born in about 1776. They were in fact born almost a decade later.

[2] It has not been possible to find an image of this miniature, but a copy was sold in the Althorp Attic Sale, Christie's, 8 July 2010, lot 18.

Exhibitions

London, An Evening Soiree at King's College, 1857;

London, Ironmongers Company Fine Art Exhibition, May 3-5 1861.

Literature:

A.B. Grimaldi, *A Catalogue, Chronological and Descriptive, of Paintings, Drawings, & Engravings by and after William Grimaldi*, p. 17, no. 56.