

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BLACK, Mary

London 1737–24.XI.1814

Daughter of Thomas Black (1715–1777), of 1 Bolton Street, Piccadilly, a painter. Harris 1993 inferred from a portrait of Thomas's brother Jonathan in "collegiate dress" that he was the Jonathan, son of Francis Black of Dean, Northamptonshire, who matriculated at Oxford in 1727. While the family were evidently of greater means than Thomas's painting would explain, the origins are nevertheless obscure. Mary's year of birth is inferred only from her age at death, as reported in the *Gentleman's magazine* ("aged 77"; Walford unhelpfully reports this as "in her 77th year"). Thomas Black was described as of the parish of St Botolph, Aldersgate when he signed an allegation for his younger daughter's marriage in 1761; by 1764, when he sent a portrait to the Free Society, he had however moved to the more affluent address of Bolton Street where Mary was to live until her death. Oddly, it was Miss Black rather than her father who was recorded in the rate books from as early as 1767. Thomas Black married twice, his second wife, also called Mary, presumably surviving him as she is mentioned in his will; it is unclear whether she was the pastellist's mother.

According to Cunningham (who describes "Mrs Black" as "a lady of less talent than good taste"), Mary was an assistant to Allan Ramsay, presumably in the early 1760s (taken on to meet the demand for repetitions of his portrait of George III). A striking oil of Dr Messenger Monsey, 1764, is in the Royal College of Physicians: Monsey, who sat to her at the suggestion of his cousin, whom she also painted, disputed the price demanded, so it remained in the artist's studio; the vituperative correspondence has been interpreted to suggest that Black's father may have painted part of it (as stated in Walford's memorandum).

A c.1766 portrait of Miss Drummond, daughter of the Archbishop of Canterbury, is known from an engraving by James Watson; the same image was engraved by Charles Corbutt, after Allan Ramsay, whose painting (not in Smart) Black presumably copied (although neither print much resembles Ramsay's work). She made copies in pastel and oil of works by Reynolds, Romney and Lawrence. A copy of a large Teniers picture for the Earl of Godolphin was particularly noted for its detail; it was disposed of by lottery, and this notice appeared in the *Public advertiser*, 28.III.1761:

THIS is to inform those of the Nobility and Gentry who have generously subscribed for Mrs Black's Copy of Teniers, that she begs the Favour of as many as will condescend to give themselves the Trouble, that they will be so good as to meet at Mr Deard's in Dover-street on Thursday the 2d of April, between Twelve and One, then and there to dispose of the Picture as first proposed, or in any other Manner that a Majority may like better. MARY BLACK

John Deards was a jeweller and toyman in Dover Street, and a member of the Society of Arts.

On seeing her pastel copy of a Guido head, Sir George Hayer is said to have remarked

"What a wonderful idea of beauty Miss Black must have had."

She exhibited from Bolton Street at the Society of Artists in 1768 in oil and pastel, but, as her obituary in the *Gentleman's magazine* noted, she "wholly devoted herself" to teaching drawing, becoming a fashionable teacher of pastel "particularly among her own sex". Northcote reported that—

Miss Black was at this time an eminent teacher of crayon painting amongst the ladies of quality, who frequently brought their performances for Sir Joshua's inspection; and I have heard him observe of Miss Black's scholars, that their first essays were better than their last.

"Miss Black" was engaged to teach "painting in crayons" to the daughters of George III according to Henry Angelo. She was made an honorary member of the Society of Artists in 1769 (a response to the Royal Academy's appointment of Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser), along with pastellists Katherine Read and Mary Benwell (*qq.v.*).

Among her other pupils were the daughters of the Duke of Gordon: an account due to Mary Black for lessons, along with crayons, papers, chalk and water colours was paid 9.VII.1774 (National Records of Scotland, Gordon papers, GD44/51/475/5). Lady Grantham (Lady Mary Yorke) wrote to her mother from Newby (29.IX.1780):

Miss Black, the Drawings Mistress, who was come down to instruct Mrs W[eddell] in Oil painting which she has lately begun, having drawn before in Chalks & I should think well, by some heads I saw her doing: Miss Black having none of her own performances with her, I could not judge of her own merit in that way, but her appearance & manner did not strike me as it was much more familiar & on equality that I think those sort of people should be allowed. She talked of Miss Egerton's paintings & indeed seemed to know the world.

Mrs Delany mentions (letter of 3.V.1781) "my friend y^e paintress" Miss Black, who arranged a "little dance" where the guests included the Lady Greys and Lady Stamford as well as Mrs Delany's great-niece, Georgiana Mary Ann Port. Others with whom she was intimate included Townshend, Waldegrave, Wellesley, Harcourt, Drummond, Murray, Walsingham and Wyndham (of Dunraven) families, and it is likely that her work may appear in those collections.

Mary Black died at Bolton Street in 1814. According to Walford, she was buried in the family vault (now sealed) in the Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, along with her sister, her father and his second wife.

Mary's sister Clara (1740–1806) was also an artist, and is credited with a mezzotint after her father's self-portrait. In 1761 Clara married Joseph Coleback (1740–1787), the son of a breeches maker, also from of the parish of St Botolph, Aldersgate. Mary's estate passed to her niece, Mary Coleback (1769–1822), wife of Thomas Walford (1762–1840), a solicitor, at a different address also in Bolton Street. One of her sons, Francis Joseph Gourdez Walford (1810–1873) wrote the note on Mary Black which remains the principal source of

information about her; another, Edward, was recorded at 1 Bolton Street in the 1840s. The list of works at the artist's house principally includes copies in oil or pastel after well-known old master and contemporary artists, some taken from prints rather than after the originals. In addition to her own pictures, Mary Black had a small collection of other pictures, among them a set of Rosalba's Four Seasons (with dove; rabbit; autumnal fruit, and Winter clothed in fur): "it is not known whether these are the originals, nor, if copies, by whom painted."

Most of the pictures were kept in the Walford family; a number of them, in various media (including the oil of Monsey), appeared in the Arle Bury sale in 1935, the property of her great-great-nephew Herbert Nevill Walford (1864–1955); the collection also included a small whole-length portrait of her standing in a sculpture gallery by William Millar, another Ramsay assistant.

No surviving pastel has been hitherto recorded, but one that may plausibly be attributed to her (corresponding with descriptions by Walpole and Walford of one of her very few original compositions) shares Katherine Read's luminous treatment of flesh with the distinctive rendering of hair and drapery found in Watson's print of Miss Drummond.

Bibliography

Reminiscences of Henry Angelo, London, 1828, p. 194; *Autobiography of Mrs Delany*, London, 1862, III, p. 17f; Cunningham 1859, IV, p. 36; Edwards 1808, p. 31; Frances Harris, "Mary Black and the portrait of Dr Monsey", *Burlington magazine*, CXXXV, .VIII.1993, pp. 534–36; London 2024; Northcote 1819, II, p. 39; Oxford DNB; Pilkington 1852; Saur; Sée 1911; Sloane 2000; Dorothy Margaret Stuart, *The daughters of George III*, London, 1939, p. 6; [Francis Joseph Gourdez Walford], *A short memoir of Miss Mary Black, an accomplished artist*, London, 1876; Waterhouse 1981; Whitley 1928, p. 238; Wright 2006; *Gentleman's magazine*, LXXXV/1, 1815, p. 89

Pastels

J.156.101 Miss Drummond [Abigail HAY-DRUMMOND (1750–1766)], daughter of the Archbishop of York, m/u

J.156.102 =?pstl, 58x48 (PC 2023) φ



J.156.103 ~version, 58x46 ov. (M. Quarrelli 1911).

Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 7 nr.

~grav. James Watson 1766



~grav. Charles Corbutt, c.1766, a/r Ramsay

J.156.105 Miss [Louisa] Murray, later Lady READE (–1821; ∞ 1814 Sir John Chandos Reade, 7th Bt), in the costume of Mary Queen of Scots, crayons (artist's house)

J.156.106 Master WYNN as St John at the spring, a/r Reynolds, crayons (artist's house)

J.156.107 Young lady holding a black dog in her hands, Society of Artists 1768a, no. 11

J.156.108 =?A Hampshire peasant girl with a black dog, life size, ¾ length, crayons (family PC 1876). Lit.: Walford 1876, p. 17 n.r.

J.156.109 =?Lady in a white dress, a pink hat tied by a ribbon, holding her dog, pstl/ppr, 76.3x62.9 (Leggatt; acqu. 1958 as by Cotes; New York, Christie's, 29.I.2015, Lot 101 repr., attr., est. \$6–8000, \$23,000 [= \$28,750]; Lowell Libson, Masterpiece fair, 2016) [new attr., ?] φαασ



J.156.111 Young lady, Society of Artists 1768b, no. 13

J.156.112 Lady, profile, pstl/ppr, 25.4x20 ov. (Sir Tollemache Sinclair. Ernest Renton; Émile Gross; Xavier Haas, New York, Anderson, 13–14.I.1927, Lot 11 repr.) φ



J.156.114 Virgin and Child, pstl, a/r Correggio, 52x42 (desc.: H. N. Walford; Arle Bury, Knight Frank Rutley, 28–30.V.1935, Lot 113 n.r.)

J.156.115 Cupid sketching, pstl, a/r Reynolds (desc.: H. N. Walford; Arle Bury, Knight Frank Rutley, 28–30.V.1935, Lot 142 n.r.)

J.156.116 Cenci, crayons (artist's house). A/r Reni pnt. (Barberini Palace)

J.156.117 Sleeping Cupid, crayons, a/r Reni (artist's house)

J.156.118 ?Martin Luther, an old man in a fur cap and coat, crayons, a/r Luttrell (artist's house)

J.156.119 Cumæan Sibyl, crayons, a/r Reni (artist's house)

J.156.12 Landscape with cattle and figures, crayons (artist's house). A/r Cuyp pnt. (Carlisle family)

J.156.121 Magdalen, not recumbent, crayons, a/r Correggio or ?Carlo Dolci (artist's house)

J.156.122 Female head, crayons, a/r Luti (artist's house)

J.156.123 Magdalen, crayons, upper part of recumbent figure a/r Correggio (artist's house)

J.156.124 Head of Magdalen, crayons, a/r Cunego grav. a/r Reni (artist's house)

J.156.125 Head and shoulders of an old man, in blue cap and brown coat, both trimmed with fur, crayons, a/r Rembrandt (artist's house)

J.156.126 Origin of Music, crayons, a/r Barry (artist's house)

J.156.127 Head and shoulders of a boy with a dog, crayons, a/r Piazzetta (artist's house)

J.156.128 Venus and Cupid, crayons, 30x25 ov, a/r Boucher (artist's house)

J.156.129 Girl in a cap, crayons, a/r Boucher (artist's house)

J.156.13 Mistress, crayons (artist's house). A/r Domenichino pnt. (Burghley House)