

Reynolds

# Mrs. Siddons as the "Tragic Muse"

BY

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

P.R.A.

On FRIDAY, JULY 4, 1919

ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE

B103806

# CATALOGUE.

On FRIDAY, JULY 4, 1919,

AT ABOUT 1.30 O'CLOCK.

*The Property of*  
*His Grace THE DUKE OF WESTMINSTER,*  
*G.C.V.O., D.S.O.*

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A.

25 PORTRAIT OF MRS. SIDDONS, AS "THE TRAGIC  
MUSE "

Sarah, eldest daughter of Roger Kemble, Actor and Manager; born 1755; sister of Fanny Kemble. Trained as a singer, but soon took up drama; married, in 1773, William Siddons, an actor in her father's company; engaged by David Garrick to play at Drury Lane in 1775-6. She gained her first great success in Manchester in 1776, under Tate Wilkinson, and was re-engaged at Drury Lane in 1782, where she completed her triumph. She was unrivalled in her performance of Lady Macbeth, which she first gave in 1785. From 1806 to 1812 she appeared at Covent Garden, where she gave her farewell performance, and retired from the stage. She died in 1831, and was buried in Paddington Churchyard

The great actress is represented seated on a throne. Her head is turned to the right, with an alert expression on her face as though intently listening to the promptings



of some distant voice. Her left elbow rests upon the arm of the throne, and her hand is thereby raised and seems to enjoin silence. Her right arm is outstretched and her hand falls lightly over the other arm of the seat, while her body assumes a forward poise. One foot rests upon a stool before her, and the throne on which she sits is raised upon a cloud

Her rich tresses are taken well back from the forehead, and a plait of hair is wound round her head and falls in a loop behind, and over all is a gilt tiara, while two other long plaits hang over each shoulder, and descend below her waist

She is attired in a rich brown costume, cut low at the neck, and with full white sleeves; a dull green skirt edged with gold covers an underskirt of pale brown. A triple row of pearls falls over her right shoulder, and is fastened in a large knot at her breast

Behind her throne, on either side, stand two attendant genii, "Crime" and "Remorse"; the figure on the left holds a poison chalice, while the one on the right grasps a poniard

*Painted in 1784*

*Signed, and dated*

*93 in. by 56 in.*

The following account of the first sitting for her portrait, narrated by Mrs. Jameson, is of interest, as quoting Mrs. Siddons' own version of what took place:—

"When I attended him for the first sitting, after more gratifying encomiums than I can repeat, he took me by the hand, saying, 'Ascend your undisputed throne, and graciously bestow upon me some idea of the Tragic Muse.' I walked up the steps, and instantly seated myself in the attitude in which 'The Tragic Muse' now appears."

The portrait of Mrs. Siddons and that of Lady Cockburn (now in the National Gallery) are the only two on which Sir Joshua inscribed his name. When Mrs. Siddons stooped down to examine what she supposed to be a piece of embroidery she noticed the signature, and

the artist replied, "I could not lose the honour this opportunity affords me of going down to posterity on the hem of your garment."

*Exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1784, No. 190, under the title of "Portrait of Mrs. Siddons: whole length"*

Purchased for 800 guineas from the artist by Monsieur de Calonne, Minister of Finance under Louis XVI. in succession to d'Ormesson. His administration proved a failure, and in 1787 he fled to London. His collection was sold in 1795, and the picture was purchased by William Smith, Esq., M.P. for Norwich, for £336

*Exhibited at the British Institution, 1813*

Mr. Smith sold the picture privately to G. Watson Taylor, Esq., M.P., for £900, and in his sale at Christie's in 1823 it was purchased by Earl Grosvenor for £1837 10s.

*Exhibited at the British Institution, 1834*

*Exhibited at Burlington House, 1870*

*Exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, 1884: Exhibition of the Works of Sir J. Reynolds*

*Exhibited at the Guelph Exhibition, New Gallery, 1891*

*Exhibited at the Grafton Gallery, 1895*

*Exhibited at Burlington House, 1896*

*Engraved by Francis Haward, A.R.A., 1787*

*Engraved by Joseph Webb, 1798*

*Engraved by Anthony Carlton, 1812 (three-quarter length)*

*Twice engraved by H. Dawe, 1826*

*Engraved by S. W. Reynolds (S. Cousins, R.A.)*

*Engraved by John Bromley*

*Engraved by Richard Josey, 1892*

*Mentioned by Dr. Waagen, Vol. II., p. 172*

*Mentioned in Sir W. Armstrong's "Sir Joshua Reynolds"*

*Fully described in Messrs. Graves and Cronin's "A History of the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.," from which the above information is taken*

*See Illustration*





REMBRANDT PHOTOGRAPHURE



