

COLNAGHI

A full-length portrait painting of a woman, The Honourable Marguerite de Fontaine Drever Joicey, seated in an ornate dark wooden chair. She is wearing a voluminous, light blue, off-the-shoulder gown with a full skirt. Her hair is styled in a short, wavy bob. She is holding a long strand of pearls in her right hand, which rests on her lap. The background is dark and indistinct.

Philip de László
The Honourable Marguerite de Fontaine Drever Joicey
1917

COLNAGHI

PHILIP DE LÁSZLÓ
(Pest 1869 – London 1937)

THE HONOURABLE MARGUERITE DE FONTAINE DREVER JOICEY, 1917

Oil on canvas

197 x 112 cm;
77 1/2 x 44 1/8 in.
Inscribed lower left: de László / 1917 / summer.

Provenance

Commissioned by James Joicey, 1st Baron Joicey (1846 – 1936), the sitter's father, 1917;
Adolfo Prías y Bertrán III conde de Prías;
Thence, by descent;
Private collection, Madrid.

Exhibitions

Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Palace of Art, North East Coast Exhibition, 1929, no. 527.

Literature

In the Matter of The British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914. Re Philip Alexius László [sic] de Lombos (Charles Russell & Co., London);

Owen Rutter, *Portrait of a Painter*, London, 1939, pp. 309–11;

Duff Hart-Davis, *in collaboration with Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, De László: His Life and Art*, Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 153, 154;

Katherine Field, with essays by Sandra de László and Geoffrey Munn, *Philip de László: Master of Elegance*, Blackmore, 2024, p. 156.

COLNAGHI



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

COLNAGHI

Seated at full length, the sitter turns slightly to the left and holds the viewer's gaze, her feet set upon a low footstool, her right hand drawn to her breast to gather a long rope of pearls. She is dressed in a gown of cream satin, edged in pink and finished with a richly embroidered hem, a blue stole falling across the arm of her tall chair. From the shadowed depth of the interior the figure emerges in passages of broken, luminous paint—cream, blue, and pearl-grey laid down with the fluent assurance for which de László was prized—so that the satin seems to gather and release the light as the eye travels across it. The effect is at once ceremonial and intimate: a full-length in the grand manner, disarmed by the candour of the young woman's arresting expression.

The Honourable Marguerite de Fontaine Drever Joicey was born on 16 September 1887, the only daughter of James Joicey, 1st Baron Joicey (1846–1936), and his second wife, Marguerite (1853–1911), daughter of Colonel Thomas Drever and granddaughter of General de Fontaine of Fontainebleau. Her father numbered among the great Durham coal owners of the day, ennobled in 1906. She did not marry and died of tuberculosis on 24 April 1924 at Turriff in Aberdeenshire at only thirty-seven. Her portrait forms part of a larger sequence of Joicey likenesses by de László, who also painted her father, her half-brother Hugh, the future 3rd Baron, and his wife Joan, as well as her sister-in-law Georgina.

The present picture, however, is bound up, with the gravest episode of the painter's career. It was among the last works de László finished before his arrest and internment in September 1917. During a sitting on 19 July that year he was visited at his Campden Hill studio by Árpád Horn, an escaped Hungarian prisoner of war bearing a begging letter; the artist gave him money, a pound of it lent for the purpose by Miss Joicey, who was present at the easel. Recognising that he had acted unlawfully, he reported Horn to the police the next day, once the final sitting was over and the picture complete; he was arrested nonetheless as a suspected enemy alien¹ and remained interned or under house arrest until his trial in 1919, at which he was fully exonerated.²

The present portrait was not de László's first attempt at the subject. A year earlier he had begun a smaller and more intimate version: a half-length, the sitter turned to the right but facing the viewer, dressed in a chemise and holding a book in both hands (fig. 1). Letters in the artist's archive record that it was on the easel by November 1916, and that Marguerite and her father went to the studio together to watch its progress, providing a glimpse of the close paternal interest that attended the commission.³ In the event de László set this first idea aside in favour of the grander full-length, which was not completed until September 1917, and the rejected canvas was rolled and stored away. In September 1926, two years after Marguerite's death, the 1st Baron, who by then had lost a wife and two sons, wrote to ask whether the painter still had the picture and whether it might be finished, a second likeness of his

¹ *In the Matter of The British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914. Re Philip Alexius László de Lombos*, p. 21

² Giles MacDonogh, "Philip de László in the Great War", *de Laszlo Archive Trust*, February 2017.

³ DLA046-0007, letter from Marguerite Joicey to de László, 15 November 1916.

COLNAGHI

daughter to set against his grief (fig. 2). De László appears to have declined, since the canvas remained rolled in his studio until his own death, when his executors, acting under his will, destroyed it in 1947 along with other works they judged unworthy of his reputation. Only the full-length survives to record both the sitter and her father's devotion.

The present, completed picture invites comparison on three fronts, notably with de László's own work, and with the two painters between whom his art is habitually placed, namely John Singer Sargent (1856 – 1925) and Giovanni Boldini (1842 – 1931). The nearest of the three comes from within de László's own work: his portrait of Lucy, Lady Duff-Gordon, or "Lucile," painted in the same year of 1917 (fig. 3). Joined by the gown itself, the two canvases belong together for reasons both material and biographical. It was Lucile's couture house that made the dress Marguerite Joicey wears, and de László, consulted by his sitter over the fabric, went with her to advise on its design. No mere purveyor of finery, Lucile was the first British designer to win international renown and went on to establish the first global couture house, where she would be credited with inventing the "mannequin parade" and training the earliest professional models. Her notorious escape from the Titanic on a lifeboat that carried only twelve of its forty places, would bring her and her husband before official inquiry on charges of cowardice and bribery. That same year, she would stand as the losing party in the precedent-setting legal case *Wood v. Lucy, Lady Duff-Gordon*, decided by Benjamin Cardozo in New York's highest court, reshaping American contract law to this day. Yet for all this celebrity, it is her couture that joins her to the present canvas: the diaphanous evening gowns of layered pastel silk, touched with flowers and pearls, that were her signature are precisely the idiom of the cream-and-pink dress Marguerite Joicey wears.

That de László should paint both the couturière and her client, the maker and the wearer of the dress, within a single year makes the two canvases natural companions, a closeness underscored by the survival, in the de László archive, of a film of the artist painting a Lucile model beside the finished portrait, a rare record of his rapid "sight-size" method.⁴ This technique involved placing the canvas directly next to the sitter, allowing the artist to step back several feet to view the subject and painting in an exact 1:1 scale. The two portraits, however, regard one another from opposite ends of a single transaction: one shows the maker, the most fêted dressmaker of her day; ours, the wearer, a young Englishwoman of rank. Together, they nonetheless complete the passage from couturière to client. Beside the likeness of the designer, the Joicey portrait is the more reticent and ceremonious of the pair, a society portrait in the fullest sense rather than the image of a professional woman of fashion.

Beyond his own studio, the portrait descends from the seated society beauty in white that Sargent carried to perfection, and to whose mantle as painter of royalty and society de László was widely held the heir. The type's *locus classicus* is Sargent's *Lady Agnew of Lochnow* (1892; fig. 4). There, the young sitter is shown seated at

⁴ <https://www.delaszlocatalogueraisonne.com/archive/film-archive/search/keywords:lucile--sorting:relevance>

COLNAGHI

three-quarter length, in a white gown sashed in mauve silk, one arm laid along the back of an eighteenth-century French chair against a shimmering hanging, her ease of posture and her frank, unflinching gaze alike remarkable for the portraiture of the moment. The handling is close kin to our present portrait, for Sargent raised the illusion of white satin from a play of cream, pink, mauve and blue—the very means by which de László models the gown here. The portrait's appearance at the Royal Academy in 1893 made the sitter a celebrity and established Sargent as the portraitist the London elite most desired, carrying the canvas into the national collection by 1925. Sargent's is prized for its languor and for the seeming spontaneity of a passing instant, de László, however, answers, a quarter of a century later, with a full-length of graver bearing and deeper repose, less the type's first audacious invention than its considered, ceremonial restatement.

The opposing pole of Belle Époque portraiture was Giovanni Boldini, the Italian “Master of Swish,” and it is against his bravura full-lengths that the Joicey portrait defines itself most sharply. His *Madame Charles Max* (1896; fig. 5) is, like the present picture and unlike the three-quarter Lady Agnew, a full-length: the Parisian singer Jeanne Max advances towards the viewer in a white gown, a shoulder strap slipped, the dress conjured in the long “saber-cut” strokes that lent it an unprecedented lightness, a manner critics habitually likened to Sargent's. Shown at the Salon of 1896, and passing afterwards through the Louvre and the Jeu de Paume before reaching the Orsay, it stands as the full-length society portrait at its most exuberant. The two pictures share their format, their white gown, and their relish for fabric resolved into light, and so belong in one conversation. But where Boldini is all restlessness and theatre, evinced in the striding step, the loosened strap, de László evokes stillness and command: his sitter rests, self-possessed and patrician, the brilliance of the brush held in check by a measured elegance and a sympathetic regard for character.

Born in Budapest and naturalised British in 1914, de László ranked among the most coveted portraitists of his generation, with works now in the National Portrait Gallery and Tate in London, the Uffizi in Florence, and numerous royal and private collections besides. It was his Hungarian birth, and his enduring ties to the lands of the former Austria-Hungary, that laid him open to suspicion in wartime. Painted at that very moment of jeopardy, the present portrait gathers the gifts for which he was prized, from the elegance of the pose and the bravura of satin and pearl to the warmth and candour of the characterisation, and binds them to a rare biographical resonance: a memorial at once to a young woman who would not see forty, and to the ordeal that overtook the man who painted her.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 1: Philip de László, *The Honourable Marguerite de Fontaine Drever Joicey*, 1917, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 71.1 cm (36 x 28 in.), destroyed 1947 in accordance with the artist's will

COLNAGHI

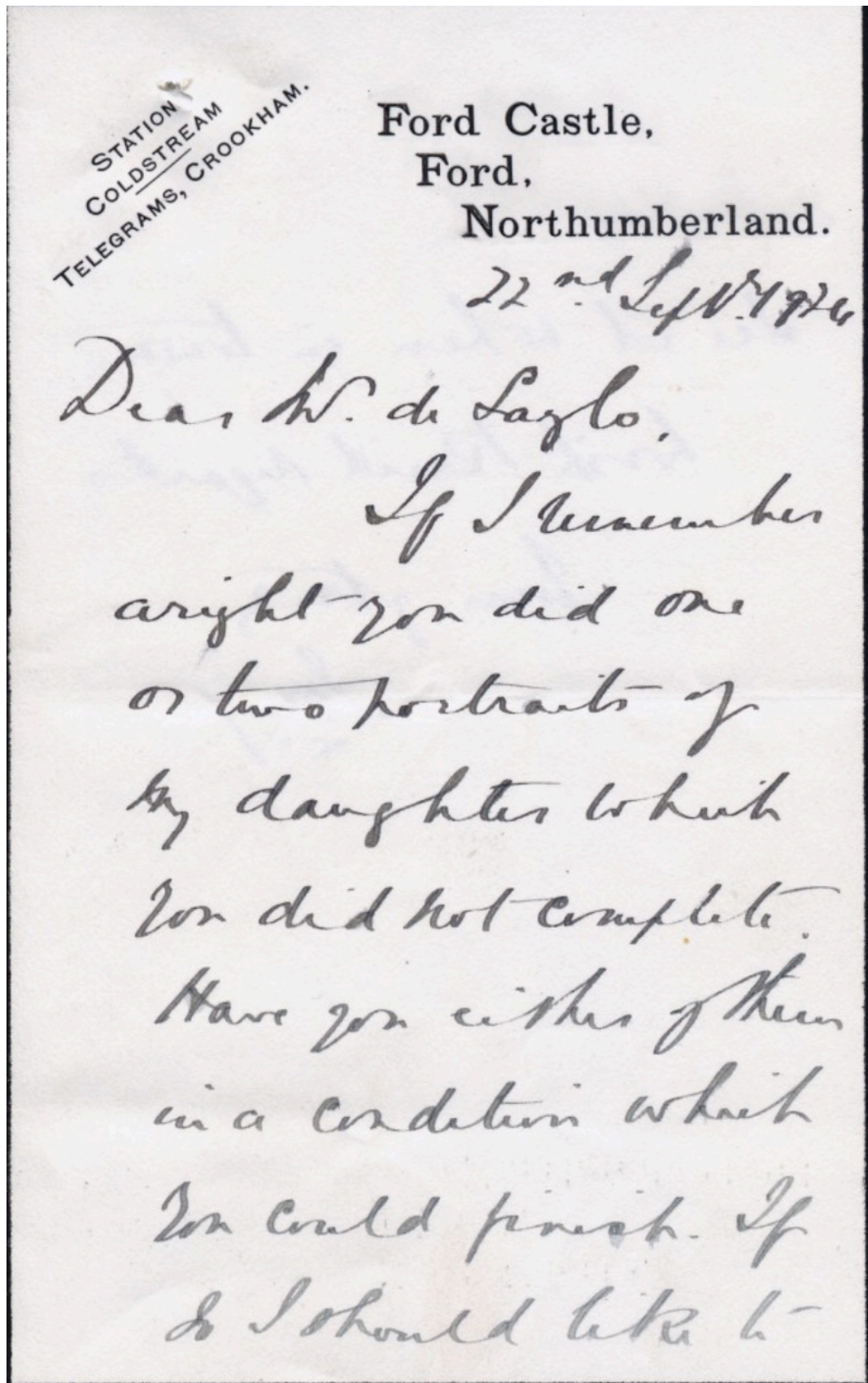


Fig. 2: Letter from Lord Joicey to de László asking if he might be to complete his daughter's unfinished portrait, de Laszlo Foundation, The de Laszlo Archive Trust Office, Glebe Place, London, inv. 123-0210

COLNAGHI



Fig. 3: Philip de László, *Lady Duff Gordon, née Lucy Christiana Sutherland*, 1913, oil on board, 40.6 x 33 cm (15 3/4 x 12 5/8 in.), private collection

COLNAGHI



Fig. 4: John Singer Sargent, *Gertrude Vernon, Lady Agnew of Lochnaw*, 1892, oil on canvas, 127 x 101 cm (50 x 39 3/4 in.), Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh, inv. NG 1656

COLNAGHI



Fig. 5: Giovanni Boldini, *Madame Charles Max*, 1896, oil on canvas, 205 x 100 cm (80 3/4 x 39 3/8 in.), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, inv. RF 1977 55