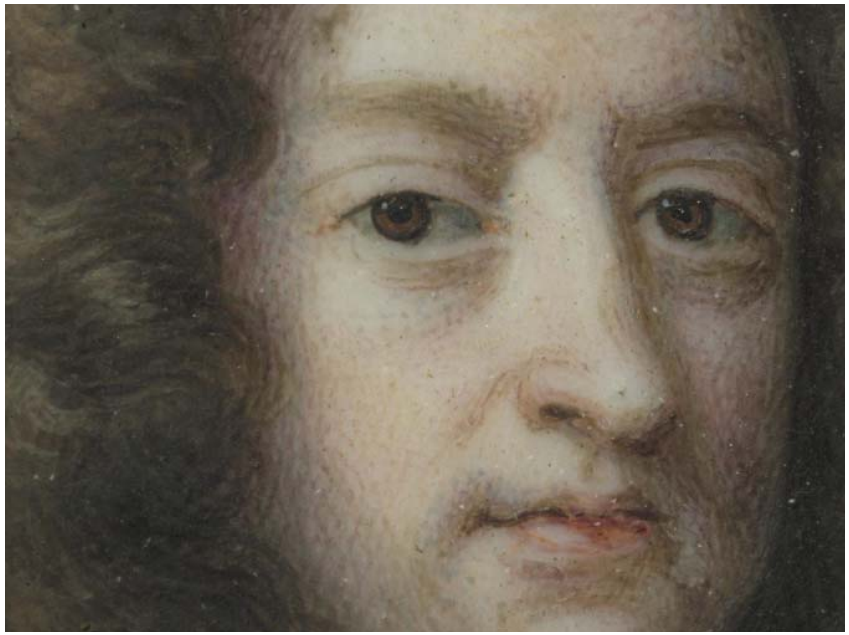
Samuel Butler
by
Sir Peter Lely
40.1215



BERNARD LENS III (English, 1681–1740)

# *Portrait of Samuel Butler*

c. 1715–20

Watercolor on ivory; oval, 4.5 x 3.7 cm (1¾ x 1½ in.)

Signature: BL (in monogram) at right; engraved on back of locket: Samuel Butler by Sir Peter Lely; on edge at upper right: 52244 mp xx

Setting: period metal frame

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1940.1215

**Provenance**

Before 1880
John Webb (d. 1880, London and Cannes); by inheritance to his daughter Edith Cragg (née Webb, d. 1925, Wrotham Place, Kent and Cannes).

1880–1925
Edith Cragg.

1925
Purchased by Jacob Nachemsohn (London), Christie's (London), June 24 (lot 143), for £13.13s.[1]

By 1930
S. J. Phillips (London).

1930
Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) for £30 ($150) September 4; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 30, 1940.

1940
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

**Exhibitions**

1865
*Special Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures on Loan at the South Kensington Museum,* London, June.

**Bibliography**

*Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures on Loan at the South Kensington Museum, June 1865,* p. 23. London: Whittingham & Wilkins, 1865.

Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection,* p. 28, no. 22, pl. V. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

BERNARD LENS III WAS THE most renowned member of an artist dynasty. His namesake father was a printmaker, his grandfather a painter, and two of his own sons became artists. Lens III was a critical figure in miniature painting as the art form transitioned away from painting on vellum. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, he established ivory as the primary miniature support in Britain, probably having seen the pioneering work of Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757) brought to England from Venice during the flowering of the Grand Tour.[2] The earliest known miniatures by Lens were painted on vellum around 1707, with examples on ivory appearing shortly thereafter. Lens spent his career in London, Bristol, and Bath while also traveling to the country estates of his influential patrons. He was painter to kings George I and George II, as well as drawing instructor to princesses Mary and Louise, the Duke of Cumberland, and Horace Walpole (1717–1797).

1 Described as "[a] miniature of Samuel Butler, Esq., wearing a wig, red coat and lace scarf, by Bernard Lens, after Sir Peter Lely."

2 Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1987; repr., 2000), p. 162.

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Although Lens painted on vellum throughout his career, the majority of his works are painted on slices of ivory, the thickness of which was gradually refined, resulting in the translucency seen in his miniatures from the end of the century. In addition to executing portraits and archaeological drawings, he worked in the moribund tradition of copying religious and mythological subjects in miniature—a practice that would be revived at the end of the eighteenth century by artists such as Henry Bone (1755–1834). Lens copied the works of easel painters including Raphael (1483–1520), Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), and Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), as well as fellow miniaturists Nicholas Hilliard (c. 1547–1619), Samuel Cooper (1608/9–1672), and Jean Petitot (1607–1691). Following the practice of his day, he painted all but the flesh tones of his miniatures in opaque watercolor. Lens often signed his work in monogram, of which this gold signature is a well-preserved example (fig. 1).

Figure 1. Monogram signature of Bernard Lens III (detail).

Painted by Lens during the middle of his career, this portrait was probably after an earlier painting believed to have been by Peter Lely (1618–1680). The sitter, Samuel Butler, turns slightly to the left and has brown eyes. A small portion of his dull red coat is visible, and he wears a white lace cravat twisted around his neck in a loose knot—an essential element of a gentleman's dress that was fashionable between the 1670s and 1690s and unlike the broad lace or linen collars that dominated in the early and mid-seventeenth century. A long, brown, curled wig falls past his shoulders, and one comma-shaped curl is arranged at the center of his forehead. Butler's voluminous wig occupies half of the painted surface. During the 1660s gentlemen regularly wore wigs, and while they offered a practical solution to such predicaments as hair loss, graying, and lice, wigs were subject to the vicissitudes of fashion.[3] The wig style seen here is that of the late seventeenth century. Around 1680 it became the norm to part the long wig at the center, which by 1700 resulted in two pronounced tufts on either side, a style not yet exhibited in this portrait.[4]

Butler was a poet and satirist popular at the court of King Charles II (reigned 1660–1685). He is primarily remembered as the author of *Hudibras*, a mock-heroic epic poem satirizing Puritanism written during the English civil war and published between 1663 and 1678. His friend the antiquarian John Aubrey described Butler as being "of a middle stature, strong sett, high coloured, a head of sorrell haire, a severe and sound judgement: a good fellowe . . . [S]atyricall witts disoblige whom they converse with, etc.; and consequently make to themselves many enemies and few friends; and this was his manner and case."[5] Butler was also an accomplished amateur painter and close friend of the greatest miniaturist of his age, Samuel Cooper.[6]

3 Susan Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), pp. 1–3.
4 Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 307–8.
5 John Aubrey, *Brief Lives,* ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 1: pp. 136, 138.
6 Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, ed. George Vertue (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849), 2: p. 374.

This miniature was described as "Samuel Butler . . . Signed P.(?) L. Ivory. Ascribed to Sir Peter Lely" when it was exhibited at the South Kensington Museum in 1865.[7] It was among the fourteen (mostly enamel) miniatures "lent by Miss Webb"—that is, presumably, Edith Cragg (née Webb). Cragg was the only daughter of the connoisseur and dealer John Webb, who was an advisor to the museum and by whom many works were given to the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum and bequeathed by his daughter in his honor to the National Gallery of Art in London. By the time Cragg sold the miniature and much of her father's collection at auction in 1925, this portrait was understood to have been painted by Lens rather than Lely.

The back of the period locket is inscribed "Samuel Butler by Sir Peter Lely," indicating the oil portrait on which Lens based this miniature, though there are currently no known extant portraits of Butler by Lely. Several known likenesses of Butler have at times been attributed to Lely, including one dated about 1675 now attributed to Gerard Soest (c. 1600–1681) at the Yale Center for British Art (fig. 2).[8] There are differences between this portrait and the Lens miniature, which portrays the sitter with a fuller cravat, shorter and less glossy wig, and red rather than black costume. However, this and another painting of Butler by Soest from the 1670s confirm the sitter's identity in the miniature.[9] Both oil portraits share distinctive facial features with the ivory, including beady eyes, a pointed nose, pronounced nasolabial folds, a thin upper lip, and a fleshy chin (figs. 2, 3). The mirror nature of the miniature suggests that Lens consulted

Figure 2. *Portrait of Samuel Butler,* c. 1675. Gerard Soest (Dutch, active England, c. 1600–1681). Oil on canvas; 76.2 x 64.1 cm (30 x 25¼ in.). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1974.3.14.

Figure 3. *Portrait of Samuel Butler,* c. 1670s. Gerard Soest (Dutch, active England, c. 1600–1681). Oil on canvas; 121.3 x 102.9 cm (47¾ x 40½ in.). National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 2468.

7 *Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures on Loan at the South Kensington Museum, June 1865* (London: Whittingham & Wilkins, 1865), p. 23, no. 331.

8 This portrait is signed "Mr. Samuel Butler | [. . .] Lelly P." in black paint on the verso, but it is believed to be a later addition. The picture is now attributed to Soest, possibly after a full-length at Knole House, Kent. http://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/1666726.

9 There has long been debate regarding the attribution to Lely and Soest of several portraits of Samuel Butler. The complexity is apparent in an 1855 publication of Butler's works that attempted to trace the changing attributions of a number of these portraits. See Robert Bell, *Annotated Edition of the English Poets: Samuel Butler, Poetical Works* (London: John W. Parker, 1855), 1: pp. 35–36; 3: p. 240.

an engraving, of which there are several based on Soest's portraits of Butler, and some of these portraits are inscribed with Lely's name. It is impossible to say which paintings or engravings Lens examined during the execution of this miniature, but many oil portraits and engravings of Butler were in circulation, none differing greatly in their representation of the man.

A portrait of Butler in the collection of the Duke of Buccleuch was once attributed to Samuel Cooper (fig. 4),[10] but in this portrait the sitter's face is longer than in the miniature, and his brow is furrowed. *Portrait of a Man Called Samuel Butler* by Peter Cross (c. 1645–1724) sold at Bonhams, London, in 2006, but the likeness is not convincing (fig. 5).[11] A further miniature portrait attributed to David Loggan (1634?–1692?) also does not resemble the established portraits of Butler (fig. 6).[12] The appearance of such (often inscribed) portraits indicates the popularity of images of Butler, one of the most important seventeenth-century British men of letters. Because of the wide variations among portraits said to be of the poet and attributed to numerous artists, Lens's work is significant in establishing Butler's miniature portrait typology. CORY KORKOW

Figure 4. *Portrait of Samuel Butler.* Possibly after Samuel Cooper (English, 1608?–1672). Inscribed "S. C.," pl. XL. Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch.

Figure 5. *Portrait of a Man Called Samuel Butler*. Peter Cross (English, c. 1645–1724). Watercolor on vellum; h. 7 cm (2¾ in.). From *Fine Portrait Miniatures* (New Bond Street, London: Bonhams, 22 November 2006), lot 37.

Figure 6. *Portrait of Samuel Butler.* David Loggan (British, 1634?–1692?). Lead pencil on vellum; dimensions unknown. Current location unknown.

10 H. A. Kennedy, *Early English Portrait Miniatures in the Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch* (London: The Studio, 1917), p. 20.
11 *Fine Portrait Miniatures* (New Bond Street, London: Bonhams, 22 November 2006), lot 37. Inscribed on the verso: "Butler/author of Hudibras." Current location unknown.
12 J. Lumsden Propert, "The English School of Miniature Art," *The Magazine of Art* (London: Cassell & Co., 1891), pp. 172, 173 (repr.). In 1891 this work was in the collection of J. Lumsden Propert. Current location unknown.