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Title: Letter from Newton Tarkington to Charles Sellers

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SEAWOOD
KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE.

November 17th
1936

Dear Mr. Sellers:

I wish I could tell you something more about your portrait of Benjamin West than you know already; but I fear I can't. I've examined the photograph and the reproduction in Gower's book (Lawrence's portrait of West in the Studio) aiding my defective eyesight with a magnifying glass, and apparently there ~~were~~ were a number of differences in the slighter modelings of the face; yet it's perfectly obvious that your portrait is founded upon that *one*.

Yours follows the other very closely indeed, perhaps as closely as Hoppner and his assistants followed in numerous replicas the original portrait he made of Pitt. It seems to me true, too, that your head of West is nearer the head of the Lawrence Studio West than some of the Stuart Vaughan type Washingtons are to one another.

I think your portrait cannot be a preliminary study of West's head painted by Lawrence before he did the large

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portrait. The indicated intention for yours to be placed in an ^{oblong} oblong frame with an interior oval seems to me to indicate that it was a later order or commission. My guess is that your picture was made for a friend or admirer of West's who wanted a portrait of him but couldn't afford (or had not the space for) a replica or copy of the full-sized portrait.

With only your photograph before me, and even if I saw the picture in what seems to be its present condition, I shouldn't back myself heavily on an opinion as to whether or not the hand that painted this head was actually Lawrence's own; I can only say that this seems rather likely. You may remember Angerstein's telling Lawrence he ought to have more assistants. People generally didn't know much about painting, Angerstein said, and Lawrence oughtn't to bother to do so much of the work himself.

I wish I might be more satisfactory and definite; but in lieu of that I suggest that at some time when you go to Boston you might take the portrait with you and get the opinion of Mr. Robert Vose of the Vose Galleries, 559 Boylston Street. He has a very good eye, especially for the

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18th and early 19th century English school. Also, as far as I can judge, this is a fine portrait and something ought to be done to keep it from going to pieces, as the crackle apparently shows that it might. Mr. Vose's advice about that would be as good as anybody's.

Thank you for the pleasure the photograph and your inquiry have given me.

Sincerely yours

Brooks Laury Lee