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## Mary Maitland (Lauder) (1548 - 1596)

3it be o<sup>ur</sup> freindschip salbe sein  
Thair is mair constancie in o<sup>ur</sup> sex  
Then euer amāg men hes bein...

—Maitland Quarto, f. 79v<sup>1</sup>



**M**ARY MAITLAND was the youngest of seven children born to Lady Mariotta (Marie) Cranston and Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington. Her father was a member of the Scots Parliament (1561-1584), Keeper of the Privy Seal (1562-1567), and Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland (1563-1567). His eyesight failing, he retired from public office in 1567, using such light as remained to spend with his books and to complete his history of the House of Seton (his maternal family). A great collector of Scots poetry and a poet himself, Sir Richard after going blind continued to compose: his devoted youngest daughter took his verse by dictation as he sat in the window of the Great Hall of Lethington.

The “Maitland Quarto” is preserved today in the Samuel Pepys Library at Cambridge. The volume is in two hands, a professional scribe’s (elegant, with flourishes); and the other, Mary’s neat round italic. Her name appears twice on the title page: once in her own hand, once in the scribe’s, both with the year 1586 – which was the year her parent died, Lady Mariotta in March, Sir Richard in August, aged 90. Many of the verses in the Maitland Quarto are by others, some from years before. () A third of the 95 poems are unattributed. The collection closes with sonnets by Thomas and Robert Hudson memorializing Sir Richard’s life.

Mary Maitland wedded late in life, on 25 June 1586, to Alexander Lauder of Haultoun (1550-1627), a younger man, and Sheriff of Edinburgh. (She kept her patronym, as was common practice in Scotland.) The Maitlands had two sons who survived, but Mary their mother is to be remembered rather for having composed one of the most poignant love poems of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is addressed, not to Alexander, but to her unnamed lover, a relationship that was forcibly ended when the young woman was married against her will to a man whom Mary figures forth as Brutus. Noting that same-sex love never dies -- Achilles and Patroclus, Achates and Aeneas, Pylades and Orestes, Titus and Josippus; and from the Bible, Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan – Maitland pledges her constancy, to death and beyond, like grieving Pirithous stretching out his arms to Theseus, on the farther shore.

In stanza 5, Maitland brackets the love of Ruth for Naomi by the love of Penelope for Ulysses, and of Portia for Brutus – thereby nudging the Ruth-Naomi relationship into the shape of a marriage. Maitland wishes (stanza 6) that she could transgender herself and take the part of Brutus (he was heroic, but no lover): the story would then be one of joy, not ending in despair as it did for Portia, who killed herself by swallowing hot coals. Instead, like Pollux and Castor, their names – hers, and hers – would be set in the stars forever, for having had one of the greatest loves the sublunary world has ever known.

A poem by a contemporary (we believe, Mary herself) envisions for Maitland a place beside Sappho and Olympia Morata as one of the great poets of the women’s tradition; and advises her to carry on, paying no mind to flatterers, idiots, fools, or to Momus (the carping critic).

Mary Maitland died in 1596, survived by her husband and two sons. Over time, her remaining poetry was either lost or discarded.

DWF

### To Your Self °

If Sappho (sage for Sapphic song so sweet)  
Did plead for praise and place amongst the Nine—  
If trusty talk with tales so true do meet—  
Amids’ the gods does dwell that dame divine!

And now of late, that lusty lady rare,  
Olympia (O lamp of Latin land!)  
So doth thy works unto this day declare  
For lively art, who list thy verse to scan.

A third (O Mastress Mary) make, I pray,  
And put in ure your worthy virtues all:  
For famous is your flying fame! I say,  
Hide not so haught a heart in sluggish thrall.

This book then bear, and beat your brains therein:  
A pleasant poet, perfit, shall ye be—  
And, little labor lost, the laurel win,  
Adorned with comely crown of poesy.

And then:  
For sychophant, for simple soul, for sot,  
Make well, mar not. For Momus, care ye not!

<sup>1</sup> photo ] Detail from Antonio Canova’s Three Graces, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

## Perfit Amity °

1

**A**S PHOEBUS in his spheris hicht  
 Precellès the kaip crepusculein  
 And Phoebe all the starris' licht,  
 Zour splendour so, Madame, I wein  
 Dois only pass all feminine  
 In sapience superlative  
 Indewèt with vertewis sa devine  
 As leirnèd Pallas redivive. 2

And as (be híd vertéw unknowèn)  
 The adamant draws iron thairtill,  
 Zour cou'tes nature so hes drawèn  
 My hairt, zours to continew still,  
 Sa greit joy dois my spreit fulfill  
 Contempling zour perfectioun,  
 Ze weild me holie at zour will  
 And raviss my affectioun. 3

Zour perlès vertew dois provoke  
 And loving kindnes so dois move  
 My mind to friendschip reciproc',  
 That treuth sall try sa far above  
 The auntient heroicis' love  
 As salbe thocht prodigious  
 And plain experiance sall prove  
 Mair holy and religious. 4

In amitiè Perithous  
 To Theseus was not so traist;  
 Nor, till Achilles, Patroclus;  
 Nor Pyladés, to trew Orést;  
 Not zit Achatès' luif so lest  
 To gud Ænee; nor sic freindschip  
 David to Jonathan professed;  
 Nor Titus trew to kynd Josíp'; 5

Nor zit Penelopé, i wiss,  
 So luiffèd Ulysses in hir dayis;  
 Nor Ruth the kind Moábitess,  
 Nohemie (as the Scripture sayès);  
 Nor Portia (quhais worthy prayis  
 In Romain historeis we reid),  
 Quha did devoir the fyrie brayis  
 To follow Brutus to the deid. 6

<sup>1</sup> *Note about the text:* The original Scots is here conservatively normalized to assist reading aloud. The yogh (as in Zour, Zit) is here represented by Z; the thorn (#w<sup>ai</sup>till, #we), by th; and the ß by -ss. The English text seeks to conserve the original Scottish forms as much as conveniently possible, with added accents to guide scansion.

<sup>2</sup> *Phoebus* ] the Sun; *Precellis* / *Precels* ] excels; *kaip crepusculein* / *cape crepusculine* ] cloak of twilight; *Phoebe* ] the Moon; *wein* / *ween* ] believe; *only* ] uniquely; *Indewèt* / *Endewed* ] endowed; *Pallas* ] Minerva, goddess of wisdom; *redivive* ] revive.

## Perfect Amity °

1

**A**S PHOEBUS in his spherè's height  
 Precels the cape crepusculine  
 And Phoebe all the starrès' light,  
 Your splendor so, M'dáme, I ween  
 Does only pass all feminine  
 In sapience superlative,  
 Endewed with virtues so divine  
 As learnèd Pallas redivive. 2

And as (by híd vertúe unknown)  
 The adamant draws iron theretil,  
 Your courteous nature so has drawn  
 My heart, yours to continue still,  
 So gréat joy does my sprite fulfill  
 Contemp'ling your perfection,  
 Ye wield me wholly at your will  
 And ravish my affection. 3

Your peerless virtue does provoke  
 And loving kindness so does move  
 My mind to friendship reciproke,  
 That truth shall try so far above  
 The ancient heroicis' love  
 As shall be thought prodigious  
 And plain experiance shall prove  
 More holy and religious. 4

In amitiè Pirithous  
 To Theseus was not so trest;  
 Nor, to Achilles, Patroclus;  
 Nor Pyladés, to true Orést;  
 Not yet Achatès' love so last  
 To good Ænae; nor such friendship  
 David to Jonathan professed;  
 Nor Titus true, to kind Josípp; 5

Nor yet Penelopé, iwis,  
 So loved Ulysses in her days;  
 Nor Ruth the kind Moábitess,  
 Naomi (as the Scripture says);  
 Nor Portia (whose worthy praise  
 In Roman histories we read),  
 Who did devour the fiery braze  
 To follow Brutus to the dead. 6

<sup>3</sup> *vertéw* / *vertúe* ] power (Fr. *vertú*); *thairtill* / *theretil* ] unto it; *spreit* / *sprit* ] spirit; *weild* / *wield* ] govern, manage; *contempling* / *contemp'ling* ] contemplating, dreaming of; *perfection* ] perfection that; *holie/wholly* ] completely; holily.

<sup>4</sup> *reciproc'* / *reciproke* ] reciprocal; *try* ] prove; *truth* ] loyalty; *above* ] superior to; *prodigious* ] astonishing and rare.

<sup>5</sup> *traist* / *trest* ] trusty, faithful;

<sup>6</sup> *i wiss* / *iwis* ] surely; *So* ] Who so; *fyrie brayis* / *fiery brays* ] burning coals (Fr. *braise*).

Wald mighty Jove grant me the hap  
 With zow to have zour Brutus' pairt  
 And metamorphosing our schap  
 My sex intill his 'vail convert—  
 No Brutus then sould caus ws smart  
 As we do now (unhappy wemen!)  
 Then sould we baith with joyful hairt  
 Honour and bliss ze band of Hymen. 1

Zea, certainly, we sould efface  
 Pollux and Castoris' memory!—  
 And if that *thay* desservèt place  
 Amang the starris, for loyalty,  
 Then our mair perfit amity  
*Mair* worthy recompence sould merit:  
 In Hevin, eternal deity  
 Amang the goddis till inherit. 2

And as we ar (thocht till our woe!)  
 Nature and Fortoun do conjúre,  
 And Hymen also be our foe,  
 Zit luif of vertew dois procure  
 Freindschip and amity sa sure,  
 With sa greit fervency and force,  
 Sa constantly, quhilk sall indure  
 That not bot deid sall ws divorce. 3

And thocht adversity ws vex,  
 Zit be our freindschip salbe sein  
 Thair is mair constancie in our sex  
 Then euer, amang men, hes bein!  
 No troubill, torment, greif, or tein,  
 Nor ertly thing sall ws dissever.  
 Sic constancy sall ws mantein  
 In perfit amity – for ever. 4

Would mighty Jove grant me the hap  
 With you to have your Brutus' part  
 And metamorphosing our shape  
 My sex into his 'vail convert—  
 No Brutus then should cause us smart  
 As we do now (unhappy women!)  
 Then should we both with joyful heart  
 Honor and bliss the band of Hymen. 1

Yea, certainly, we should efface  
 Pollux and Castor's memory!—  
 And if that *they* deservèd place  
 Among the stars, for loyalty,  
 Then our more perfit amity  
*More* worthy recompence should merit:  
 In Heaven, eternal deity  
 Among the goddès to inherit. 2

And as we are (though to our woe!)  
 Nature and Fortune do conjúre,  
 And Hymen also be our foe,  
 Yet love of virtue does procure  
 Friendship and amity so sure,  
 With so great fervency and force,  
 So constantly, which shall endure  
 That nought but death shall us divorce. 3

And though adversity us vex,  
 Yet by our friendship shall be seen  
 There is more constancy in our sex  
 Than ever, among men, has been!  
 No trouble, torment, grief, or teen,  
 Nor earthly thing shall us dissever.  
 Such constancy shall us maintain  
 In perfit amity – for ever. 4

Immediately following "To Your Self" in the Maitland Quarto are six more items by Mary, in the first of which she asks the gods and goddesses for strength. If written in 1586, the poem may refer (as previous editors have supposed) to the completion of her father's poetry book: Sir Richard died on 20 March 1585/6, age 90. But, if like "Perfect Amity," these lines were written some time before, they may recall the memory of a great love affair that ended in marriage.

Ze heavenly gods and goddessis,  
 ze most celestial,  
 Unto my Muse zour aidis I call  
 And thou, Diana, lady bricht,  
 with nymphs of chastity:  
 Graunt me your favours, I requeist,  
 to end this worthily.

Ye heavenly gods and goddesses,  
 ye most celestial,  
 Unto my Muse your aids I call  
 And thou, Diana, lady bright,  
 with nymphs of chastity:  
 Grant me your favors, I request,  
 to end this worthily.

<sup>1</sup> *hap* ] luck; *have your Brutus' part* ] play the role of Brutus (your husband) to your role as Portia; perhaps also with erotic innuendo; *'vail* ] avail, benefit, privilege, authority; *smart* ] pain; *bliss* ] bless, make blissful; *band of Hymen* ] marriage bond.

<sup>2</sup> *Pollux* ] Castor and Pollux, the sons of Leda, inseparable in life, at death were turned into stars.

<sup>3</sup> *conjure* ] conspire; *Hymen* ] god of marriage.

<sup>4</sup> *tein / teen* ] sorrow

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