

Dunbar, and some late medieval poems which would otherwise be lost to us including the lively love allegory, *King Hart*.

The Maitland Folio is a truly miscellaneous collection of Scottish and a few English texts and its many misogynist poems indicate that Helen Maitland must have been thick-skinned if she enjoyed reading all of its contents. The Maitland Quarto, with which Marie is associated, is a different book altogether and more reflective of a mixed family audience of readers, and indeed of writers too. As well as the poems in the Quarto attributed to Richard and John Maitland, and to noteworthy associates, the manuscript also contains thirty-eight anonymous poems, which are likely to have been composed by family members and close friends. Amongst these are poems which relate to family affairs (including one poem in praise of the Maitland home, Lethington) and several poems on

understanding of the Quarto and the culture which created it is hardly done justice by such a description. The poem's manuscript title is also slightly misleading as the lyric is concerned more widely than this suggests with reading and writing and with the materiality and ownership of the book. The poem begins by cautioning anyone who chooses to praise such a famous work as the Bible in writing ('by pen'), and modestly protests the author's own inability to give proper account of its value. This is of course belied by the elegant succinctness of the lyric's style. The poem then goes on to describe the elaborate binding on the 'gilt' or gilded bible as a way of figuring its spiritual treasures. This description brings to mind real examples of decorative covers which were made for copies of devotional texts including the Bible and Psalters: some of these were embroidered, and others were tooled leather laid on oak boards, the most

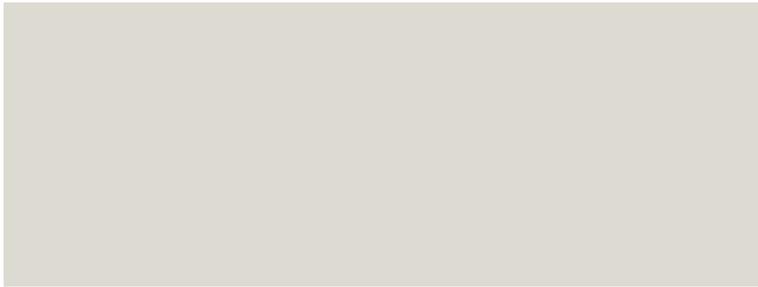
idyllic woodland grove where 'Marie' and her female attendants are found, Diana-like. The significance of the poem's heraldic beasts, the lion and the harts, is difficult to determine, but the intimate audience for which the Quarto was compiled surely made connections now lost to us: the eighteenth-century editor of poems from the Maitland Manuscripts, John Pinkerton, suggested that the lion represented William Maitland, who died ignominiously in 1573 after the fall of Edinburgh Castle, but the lion could equally represent Marie's ailing father.⁹ The poem's pun on Marie's name is perfectly clear, however: 'Mait, land, and gold scho gave abundantlie' (l. 42, 'Mait' here means 'food'). It invests Marie with authority and financial autonomy, indicating her importance within her family. It is possible that the presentation of Marie in these terms, if to be understood literally rather than figuratively, is related to the fact of her forthcoming marriage in on 9 August 1586 to Alexander Lauder. Her landed and monetary wealth, an ability to provide a tocher, would have been especially significant under such circumstances. However, the poem also stresses Marie's continued commitment to virginity, which is less easy to relate to this context, even though her purity would of course be highly valued by her suitor. Her chastity seems to go hand in hand with her creativity in the poem. Marie carries a branch, 'ane flourishit trie', which bears a written pledge to 'sustein' virginity, presumably her own, and perhaps also that of others through the influence of her example or writing:

Quhairin wes writtin, with letteris properlie,
 'This is in sing of trew virginitie,
 Quhilk I haue socht and luiffit best of all;
 Heirfoir I sall, with cair most diligentlie,
Sustein the same that it ressaue no fall.' (lines 44-48)

The women in her company, who include Diana, Minerva and Cleo signify chastity, wisdom, creativity and virtue.

The female book owner of 'In Prais of ane Gilt Bybill' is therefore much in the image of the pious, faithful and educated 'Marie' of poems 85 and 69. It provides additional evidence amongst the Maitland Quarto texts that women in the Maitland circle were engaged in literary activities, and fostered creativity and wisdom as well as values such as modesty and chastity which were more traditionally expected of their sex. The poem also reminds us that by the 1580s such activities were often conducted in a protestant ethos which valued the reading of the Bible and other 'godly' texts within the family. We know from

poems copied into the Maitland Folio that members of the Maitland family had access to the popular collection of Lutheran hymns and catechetical material, known as *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis*, which was printed in 1565, 1568 and 1578. Other poems in the Maitland Quarto look to such a literary and devotional context. Poem 24, for example, a *contrafactum* attributed to Richard Maitland and based on a secular poem associated with Henry VIII,¹⁰ explores the comfort and knowledge to be gained from looking 'in Goddis buik', and from shared reading of the Bible when individual meditation on the text is impossible:



Who takis in hand by pen		
To prais a wark with fame,		
Advysedlie sould luik, then loup,		<i>leap</i>
For hazard of his name.		
This buik all prais deseruis,		5
My prais it wer but vain;		
3it, gentle reader, mark, I say,		
And thyne salbe the gain.		

¹ For an edition of the manuscript, see W.A. Craigie, ed., *The Maitland Quarto Manuscript*, Scottish Text Society new ser., 9 (Edinburgh and London, 1920). A new edition, edited by Joanna Martin, is under preparation for the Scottish Text Society for publication in 2014.

² For an edition see W. A. Craigie, ed., *The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, STS, new ser., 7, 20 (Edinburgh and London, 1919-27). For a discussion of the Folio and its family context see Julia Boffey, 'The Maitland Folio Manuscript as a Verse Anthology', in *William Dunbar the Nobill Poyet: Essays in Honour of Priscilla Bawcutt*, ed. Sally Mapstone (East Linton, 2001), pp. 40-50.

³ Evelyn S Newlyn, 'A Methodology for Reading Against the Culture: Anonymous Women Poets, and the Maitland Quarto Manuscript (c. 1586)', in *Women and the Feminine in Medieval and Early Modern Scottish Writing*, eds Sarah M. Dunnigan, C. Marie Harker, and Evelyn S. Newlyn (Basingstoke, 2004), pp.89-103.

⁴ Priscilla Bawcutt, 'French Connections? From the *Grand Rhétoriques* to Clément Marot', in *The European Sun: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature*, ed. Graham Caie, R.J. Lyall, Sally Mapstone, and K. Simpson (East Linton, 2001), pp.119-28.

⁵ Sarah Dunnigan, 'Scottish Women Writers, c. 1560-1650', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 15-43.

⁶ For example, see Evelyn S Newlyn, 'A Methodology for Reading Against the Culture'; Sarah Dunnigan, 'Undoing the Double Tress: Scotland, Early Modern Women's Writing, and the Location of Critical Desires', in *Feminist Studies*, 29.2 (2003), pp.298-319; Sarah Dunnigan, 'Feminising the Early-Modern Erotic: Female Voiced Lyrics and Mary Queen of Scots', in *Older Scots Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (Edinburgh, 2005), pp.441-66.

⁷ See the National Library of Scotland's Decorative Bookbindings page for more information and examples from the collection. Also see William Smith Mitchell, *History of Scottish Bookbinding, 1432 to 1650* (Edinburgh, 1955).

⁸ Priscilla Bawcutt, "'My bright buke": Women and their books in Medieval and

Renaissance Scotland', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, eds J Wogan-Browne, R. Voaden, A. Diamond, L. Hutchinson, C. Meale, and L. Johnson (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 17-34 (23).

⁹ John Pinkerton, ed., *Ancient Scottish Poems Never Before in Print*, 2 vols (London, 1786), pp. 428-29.

¹⁰ A. A. MacDonald, 'Sir Richard Maitland and William Dunbar: Textual Symbiosis and Poetic Individuality', in *William Dunbar, The Nobill Poyet: Essays in Honour of Priscilla Bawcutt*

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The Quarto poems which concern Marie Maitland have begun to receive the critical attention they deserve by scholars such as Evelyn Newlyn and Sarah Dunnigan.⁶ One short but fascinating poem in the collection, however, has received less comment. This is number 77 in the Quarto which the scribe entitles, 'In Prais of ane Gilt Bybill'. The poem, printed here, is composed in a simple hymnal stanza (ab³c⁴ b³), although it is set out in long lines in the manuscript, presumably to allow the scribe to fit it onto folio 120v between the end of one poem and the ornately-written title of the next. It thus has something of the character of a 'page-filler' in the manuscript, although its significance for our understanding of the Quarto and the culture which created it is hardly done justice by such a description. The poem's manuscript title is also slightly

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All plesour vaine I will refuse,
For my pastyme the byble vse;
Thocht I be auld and may not sie,
I sall it gar be red to me (*have it read to me*)
(lines 9-12)

A number of poems in the manuscript, including some attributed to the protestant principal of King’s College Aberdeen, Alexander Arbuthnot, explore finer points of reformed theology, and position their readers as the ‘elect’, amongst God’s chosen people. Several of the unattributed poems in the Maitland Quarto are penitential works, often ecstatic in tone, which draw heavily on the psalms, thus adopting forms and concerns which reflected a renewed interest in personal spirituality in the years following the Reformation. This extract from poem 73 provides an example of the tenor of the Quarto’s moderately-protestant devotional verse:

Cum sinneris now, the Lord doeth on ws call.
Cum all with me, cum pray with one consent,
Cum, cum in tyme, and doe our sinnis repent;
Cum now with humble hairtis, 3e wretchis all,
Befoir our God for mercie lat ws fall (lines 23-27)

Thus ‘In Prais of ane Gilt Bybill’, despite its brevity and simplicity, offers a fascinating way into exploring the culture of the lairdly classes in the third quarter of the sixteenth-century, and alongside other lyrics in the Maitland Quarto reminds us of the creative and intellectual activities of women in such contexts. In particular, it alludes to women as book owners and readers, and suggests their importance as exemplars of wisdom, fidelity and piety in the family.

Who takis in hand by pen

To prais a wark with fame,		
Advysedlie sould luik, then loup,		<i>leap</i>
For hazard of his name.		
This buik all prais deseruis,		5
My prais it wer but vain;		
3it, gentle reader, mark, I say,		
And thyne salbe the gain.		