



1. Marguerite Lemon Angloise, by Wenceslas Hollar after Anthony Van Dyck. 1646. Etching and engraving, 26.1 by 18.1 cm. (National Portrait Gallery, London).

‘Qualis vita, finis ita’: The life and death of Margaret Lemon, mistress of Van Dyck

by HILARY MADDICOTT

Although she was noted as the mistress of Anthony van Dyck during his time in London, almost nothing is known about the life of his mistress Margaret Lemon. Newly discovered evidence adds to the little hitherto recorded of her life, and provides information for the first time about her death.

IN 1646 WENCESLAS HOLLAR published in Antwerp an etching after an earlier portrait by Anthony van Dyck of Margaret Lemon, the painter’s most famous mistress (Fig.1).¹ Appended to the print are ten lines of verse in French. The first four lines are a paean to the youth and beauty for which Lemon had apparently become celebrated among the greatest of the English nobility. They may be translated:

Flora, Thisbe, Lucretia, and Porcia and Cypris
Cannot dispute with me the prize for love.
In the isle of Albion I was almost worshipped,
By a thousand great lords I saw myself honoured . . .²

But in spite of her contemporary celebrity, little evidence of Lemon’s life survives and no record of her last years and death has until now been traced. This article presents recently discovered documentation concerning Lemon’s death and suggests new insights into the little that is known of her life.

In her various accounts of Lemon’s life, including an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Susan E. James suggests that a variant spelling of her surname, ‘Lemans’, indicates Flemish ancestry.³ The only art-work inscription of her name almost certainly made during her lifetime spells it ‘Lemon’ (see Fig.6), but although some near-contemporary sources record it as ‘Leman’ and ‘Leaman’, none gives it as Lemans.⁴ ‘Lemon’ and ‘Leman’ are family names found in parish records through-

out south-east England and either version suggests that Lemon’s ancestry was probably English rather than Flemish.⁵ James estimates the date of her birth as c.1614, based on her identifications of the earliest likenesses of Lemon, which, she claims, appear in several of Van Dyck’s works in the late 1620s, such as *Vertumnus and Pomona* (Galleria de Palazzo Bianco, Genoa) and *Rinaldo and Armida* (Baltimore Museum of Art). Both works were painted abroad, the first in Italy and the other in Antwerp, and it seems unlikely that Van Dyck was in contact with Lemon in either location.⁶ Nothing is known about her early life, upbringing and education before, at some point during the 1630s, she became Van Dyck’s mistress. James suggests that the relationship probably began around 1632–33 during the painter’s second stay in London, from 1632 to 1641, while Lemon was still in her teens, and that she remained his mistress until, it must be assumed, his marriage to the aristocratic Mary Ruthven.⁷ This took place in February 1640.⁸ But for a year, from March 1634 to March 1635, Van Dyck was in Flanders, where he fathered a daughter by another woman.⁹ A letter from Viscount Conway to Thomas Wentworth written in London in January 1637 refers to Van Dyck’s attempts the previous year to win the love of Lady Stanhope (1609–67).¹⁰ It seems likely, therefore, that Lemon lived with Van Dyck as his mistress for, at most, only three years, from perhaps late 1636 until sometime before his marriage. But however long or short her stay with Van Dyck, there is no evidence that, as James claims, she ‘presided’ over his houses at Blackfriars and Eltham.¹¹ Unquestionably, however, Lemon would have enjoyed a life of luxury and privilege during her stay in Van Dyck’s lavishly maintained household, where Charles I and his courtiers were welcome visitors.

Frequently quoted comments by two contemporaries are the source of what little is known of Lemon’s life and character. Hollar, an admirer of Van Dyck, and in England from 1637 to 1644, is reported to have claimed that she was a ‘dangerous woman’ and so jealous of Van Dyck’s unchaperoned female

I would like to thank the owner of Van Dyck’s portrait of Margaret Lemon illustrated as Fig.2 for his generosity in giving permission for its reproduction. I am grateful to Karen Schaffers at the Fondation Custodia, Paris, for help and information communicated ahead of her publication of the Fondation’s catalogue. I would also like to thank Kate Ballenger, Kate Bennett, Andrew Dunkley, Karen Hearn and Kelly Pask for their help.

¹ S. Turner: *The New Hollstein German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts: Wenceslas Hollar*, ed. G. Bartrum, Ouderkerk aan den IJssel 2009–10, pt.III, no.867, pp.148–49. The verses are inscribed ‘R. G. Sr. D. L.’, presumably the initials of the author, who has not been identified.

² ‘Flore, Thisbé, Lucesse, & Porcie & Cypris / Ne peuuent en Amour me disputee le pris. / Dans l’Ile d’Albion ie fus presque adorée, / De mille grands Seigneurs ie me vis honorée . . .’. Author’s translation.

³ S.E. James: ‘Margaret Lemon (b.c.1614), artist’s model’, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter ODNB), www.oxforddnb.com (accessed 20th October 2017); *idem*: ‘Margaret Lemon: model, mistress, muse’, *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk*

Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen, Antwerp 1999, pp.90–109, esp. p.93.

⁴ See notes 13 and 45 below for ‘Leman’ sources.

⁵ Sir John Leman (1544–1632), a hugely wealthy City merchant from Suffolk, left £500 to each of his unmarried great-nieces still under the age of twenty-one in his will drafted in 1631, National Archives, London, PROB 11/161/375, fols.229–35. One of them might conceivably have been Margaret.

⁶ James, ODNB, *op. cit.* (note 3). On these paintings, see S.J. Barnes, N. de Porter, O. Millar and H. Vey: *Van Dyck, A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, New Haven and London 2004, pp.166–67, cat.II.22 and pp.294–95, cat.III.61.

⁷ James, ODNB, *op. cit.* (note 3).

⁸ Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁰ Letter from Edward, Viscount Conway, to Thomas, Viscount Wentworth, Lord Deputy of Ireland, 22nd January 1636 (i.e. 1637), in *The Earl of Strafforde’s Letters and Dispatches*, ed. W. Knowler, London 1739, II, p.48.

¹¹ James, ODNB, *op. cit.* (note 3).



2. *Margaret Lemon*, by Anthony van Dyck. c.1638. Canvas, 59.5 by 49.5 cm. (Private collection, New York).

sitters that 'in a hysterical fit' she once threatened to bite his right thumb off in order to wreck his career.¹² Although this story sounds circumstantial enough to be credible, its authenticity has never been established. Of more certain authority is a comment by the diarist Richard Symonds (1617–69). Writing in the early 1650s, he noted that it was 'wondered by some that knew him that he [Van Dyck] having lived in Italy, he would keep a Mrs of his in his howse, Mrs Leman & suffer Porter to keep her company'.¹³ This Porter has generally been assumed to be Endymion Porter (1587–1649), a genial courtier and a great friend of Van Dyck, but it has also been suggested that he could have been Endymion's younger brother, George.¹⁴ Whichever Porter was referred to, it appears that his keeping company with Lemon under Van Dyck's roof caused some gossip about the painter's tolerance of the relationship. For his part, Van Dyck is reported to have complained to the King about the costs of

keeping an open table for all his friends as well as an open purse for his mistresses.¹⁵ Lemon, it seems, was not Van Dyck's only mistress during his London years; on the other hand, the verse accompanying Hollar's print indicates that she too had many admirers, if not lovers.

Other evidence for Lemon's life comes from works of art. James claims that she appears in some twelve paintings by Van Dyck, arguing that the number of times he chose to paint her portrait and the length of time she also acted as his model is indicative of her impact on his art.¹⁶ In the standard catalogue raisonné of Van Dyck's paintings, however, Oliver Millar identifies only three extant portraits in oil of her. The first of these (Fig. 2), dated by Millar to c.1638, is the original from which Hollar's etching derives, as well as a number of later copies and versions by other artists. A head and shoulders portrait, it depicts Lemon in the fashions of a lady of the court: her shoulder-length hair is wavy and curled and she wears a pearl necklace and silk gown as well as a garland of red flowers and a jewel in her hair.¹⁷ Although he portrayed her as the epitome of youth and beauty, Van Dyck also depicts her – looking back over her left shoulder at the spectator – with a certain self-assurance; she has a will of her own. Her glance conveys an intimacy and close relationship between sitter and artist: as Millar writes, the painting was 'probably always designed to be a very personal and private work of art'.¹⁸

The portrait has been trimmed from a larger canvas, as the small part of the sitter's left arm and hand in the bottom left-hand corner makes plain. An engraving of this portrait in an octagonal frame by Jean Morin (c.1595–1650) excludes any trace of arm or hand, but a drawing in the Fondation Custodia, Paris, depicts Lemon's left arm with her hand outstretched, as though to grasp something (Fig. 3). It has recently been suggested that this drawing, formerly considered a preliminary study by Van Dyck, is a sketch by Peter Lely of the original portrait, which had remained – for whatever reason – unfinished.¹⁹ An early copy of the painting shows Lemon holding a sword, the traditional attribute of Judith.²⁰ However, in Hollar's print after the painting, and another by Adriaen Lommelin (fl.1630–40), Lemon's right hand (reversed, of course, from the original) is holding a posy of spring flowers, including a daffodil and a tulip. Given that the posies as depicted by Lommelin and Hollar are identical, it is likely that both prints are after a lost copy of the portrait that represented Lemon as Flora in an image reflecting the attributes of the goddess: spring, flowers and the radiance of youth. There may have been an added meaning, since, according to some traditions, Flora was a courtesan.²¹

¹² J. Urzidil: *Hollar, a Czech Emigré in England*, London 1942, p.42. This is an abridged translation of *idem: Wenceslaus Hollar, der Kupferstecher des Barock. Unter Mitarbeit von Franz Sprinzels*, Vienna 1936, where the reference is at p.81. Urzidil, whose interests were primarily literary, and who, at the time of writing the book had never visited England, gives no reference in either work for this information, which has not been traced in any English source. It is possible that the story derives from an oral tradition provided to Urzidil by his collaborator, the art collector Franz Sprinzels (later known as Francis Springell).

¹³ R. Symonds: 'Notebook', British Library, London, Egerton MS 1636, fol.102.

¹⁴ L. Cust: *Anthony van Dyck: An Historical Study*, London 1905, p.136.

¹⁵ W.H. Carpenter: *Pictorial Notices, Consisting of a Memoir of Sir Anthony van Dyck*, London 1844, p.33. The source for Van Dyck's supposed remark has not been traced.

¹⁶ James, *ODNB*, *op. cit.* (note 3); James, *Jaarboek*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 91, claims that Lemon was one of the chief inspirations of Van Dyck's mature works. For a critical view of James's articles, see B. Grosvenor and E. Rutherford: *exh. cat. Warts and All: The Portrait Miniatures of Samuel Cooper (1607/8–1672)*, London

(Philip Mould & Co.) 2013, p.33, and S. Alsteens and A. Eaker: *Van Dyck: The Anatomy of Portraiture*, New York 2016, p.247, note 1.

¹⁷ Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.551; Alsteens and Eaker, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp.244–47.

¹⁸ Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.551.

¹⁹ Alsteens and Eaker, *op. cit.* (note 16), p.244.

²⁰ Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.551, citing copies at Longleat, in a private collection in Honolulu and one formerly in the collection of Horace Walpole.

²¹ Lists of paintings by Van Dyck in his house at the time of his death (but drawn up some years later) record a portrait of 'The Ladye with Flowers', also listed as 'The Lady with flowers on her head', see C. Brown and N. Ramsay: 'Van Dyck's collection: some new documents', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, 132 (1990), pp.704–09, esp. pp.707 and 708. Just possibly this painting was either the portrait now in New York or the copy that Lommelin and Hollar used as the source for their prints.

²² Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 552, cat.IV.157. Although listed second by Millar, this could have been Van Dyck's first painting of Lemon, who perhaps

The second portrait of Lemon listed by Millar, also dated c.1638, was acquired by Charles I and was perhaps painted for him (Fig.4).²³ Echoing Titian's *Lady in a fur wrap* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), itself modelled on a classical statue, the *Venus Pudica*, and perhaps designed to represent the sitter as Venus, it depicts Lemon apparently naked under a large red silk wrap that fails, seductively, to conceal one of her breasts. Red was associated with high status, but it was also the colour of passion, and scarlet was the signifier of harlotry. In spite of her *déshabillé*, Lemon is again wearing the tokens of upper-class fashion: a pearl necklace and, this time, earrings. Her pose is demure but sensuous; her direct gaze perhaps challenging. The Titianesque qualities of the portrait would have been much to the taste of the King, but they would also have been prized by Van Dyck, who might well have wanted to keep a copy of the painting for himself. 'A curtisan in red', listed in Van Dyck's house at the time of his death in 1641, may be such a copy.²³

In the third painting listed by Millar, dated to the late 1630s, Lemon is depicted half-length in a portrait closely modelled on the New York painting (Fig.5).²⁴ A pearl earring is visible and Lemon's curls and ringlets, highlighted with gold, are now fashionably braided with pearls, but this time she is wearing a steel breastplate over a voluminous undergarment while her left hand rests on a formidably large steel helmet. Her gaze is cool and composed, but the delicacy of her features and hands suggests a feminine fragility at odds with the armour she proposes to wear for her forthcoming mission. A prominent smiling Cupid – representing the compelling power of love – is behind her, touching her right shoulder and urging her forwards. This portrait is thought to portray Lemon as Erminia, one of the heroines of Torquato Tasso's popular chivalric romance *Gerusalemme liberata*, which was translated into English in 1600.²⁵ The painting illustrates Erminia about to set out from Jerusalem in the armour of her friend Clorinda to aid Tancred, whom she loves.

In spite of James's claims, in no work by Van Dyck other than these three paintings can Lemon's likeness confidently be identified.²⁶ They have all been dated to the later part of Van Dyck's second stay in England, strengthening the likelihood that his relationship with Lemon was confined to a few years in the later 1630s. If the suggestion is correct that Van Dyck's original painting of her was modelled on a female portrait by Palma Vecchio (now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), the relationship may have lasted not much more than a year, given that the Palma Vecchio arrived in England with the Duke of Hamilton's purchase of the Della Nave collection in October 1638.²⁷ Lemon was not, apparently, Van Dyck's 'muse' for



3. Margaret Lemon, attributed to Peter Lely after Anthony van Dyck. Brush and grey ink on paper, 24.8 by 14.5 cm. (Fondation Custodia, Paris).

any great length of time, nor, consequently, can it be claimed that she exerted a great impact on his art, as James has argued. Given her portrayal as Flora, the personification of springtime and youth, the date of her birth could also be revised to c.1618 rather than c.1614.²⁸

There is another and more surprising image of Lemon, by Samuel Cooper (1609–72; Fig.6). In a miniature inscribed with her name, he depicts her in the costume of a fashionable male courtier or gentleman. She sports a tall black hat, a white lace collar and a black velvet suit with slashed sleeves, under which is a white shirt with lace cuffs. Wrapped round her arms is a black velvet cloak. Bendor Grosvenor has detected a 'melancholy air' in the portrait, and argues that the black costume

modelled for him on this occasion before she became his mistress.

²³ Brown and Ramsay, *op. cit.* (note 21), p.707. By the time of Van Dyck's death on 9th December 1641, Charles was engulfed in political crisis; in the first week of January 1642 he fled from London, never to return there as a free man. It seems unlikely that he had occasion over those few weeks to have acquired the portrait from Van Dyck's former home. Since Millar dates the work to c.1638 Charles probably acquired it shortly after that date, while a copy might have been made for Van Dyck.

²⁴ Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 553; see also K. Hearn, ed.: exh. cat. *Van Dyck & Britain*, London (Tate Britain) 2009, p.141, no.69.

²⁵ E. Fairfax: *Godfrey of Bulloigne, or the Recovery of Jerusalem*, London 1600, p.112: 'The rugged steele oppressed and offended / her dainty necke and locks of shining gold. . . / She feigned courage, and appeared bold; / Fast by her side unseen smil'd Venus sonne'.

²⁶ James, *ODNB, op. cit.* (note 3); See Alsteens and Eaker, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp.242–43, for a drawing, *Head of a reclining woman*, in the Fitzwilliam Museum,

Cambridge, which has been identified as a study of Lemon by Van Dyck, although the attribution and the identification of the sitter remain to be established beyond doubt: Alsteens and Eaker, p.242. C. Brown: *Van Dyck, 1599–1641*, London 1999, p.31, notes that Lemon is also 'traditionally said to have been the model for Psyche in Van Dyck's *Cupid and Psyche*' (Royal Collection, London), a painting probably designed for a decorative scheme for the Queen's House, Greenwich, in the late 1630s and the only mythological painting known to have been commissioned by the crown in all the years Van Dyck spent in England. It is possible that she was the model, but the face is too obliquely depicted to allow confident identification.

²⁷ J. Wood: 'Van Dyck's "Cabinet de Titien", the contents and dispersal of his collection', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, 132 (1990), p.693.

²⁸ Thus she would be aged around twenty at the time of the portrait of Flora and seventeen at the time of the Cooper miniature (see note 29, below). Twenty seems a more appropriate age for her portrayal as Flora rather than the twenty-four she would have been if born in 1614, as suggested by James, *ODNB, op. cit.* (note 3).

and the broken column in the background denote a tragedy. He suggests that the portrait in some way relates to Lemon's grief following Van Dyck's death in December 1641.²⁹ But it is not clear why she would choose to dress as a man to signal her mourning. Karen Schaffers has, however, dated the miniature on stylistic grounds to 1635–37.³⁰ Lemon is wearing her hat at a slight angle, thereby conveying a certain jauntiness: the miniature, rather than denoting a grief-stricken sitter, could alternatively be portraying her in a pose of youthful *jeu d'esprit*, challenging the gender-prescribed dress codes of conventional society. Cross-dressing was regarded with abhorrence by the puritan clergy on religious grounds, as a defiance of the divinely ordained subordination of the female; it was also more generally linked with sexual licentiousness and violence.³¹ This image, therefore, may convey more than youthful high spirits: it could represent Lemon's defiance of the normative rules of society.

Although only four portraits of Margaret Lemon can be securely identified, they provide evidence that she was a woman of fashion and sophistication who was also depicted as a courtesan. The portraits convey her beauty and youthfulness, but in addition indicate that she had the strength of personality to challenge the norms of religious authority and conventional society, in dress as well as in life. If the earlier date for the Cooper miniature is accepted, it predates Van Dyck's portraits of Lemon, suggesting that she was already a person of interest and celebrity, or indeed notoriety, in London some years before she can be reckoned to have become his mistress. Taken in conjunction with the comment of the verse on Hollar's print about the 'thousand great lords' who honoured her, there can be little doubt that she was a high-class courtesan. But Hollar's reputed story that she was also a 'dangerous woman' who threatened physical violence on occasion should not be completely dismissed. Living with Lemon might have been a tempestuous affair – indeed, Van Dyck's marriage is said to have been arranged by the King to save the deteriorating health of his favourite artist.³²

What happened to Lemon after Van Dyck's marriage? James writes that she continued to live in London, although she later admits that the place and date of Lemon's death are not known.³³ A clue to her ultimate fate lies hidden in plain sight: it is in the first line of the verses on the Hollar print. There Lemon is ranked as superior in love to Flora and Cypris.³⁴ As described above, the former was probably the intended subject of the New York portrait. Cypris – a name for Aphrodite or Venus – was the goddess of beauty. But the other three names, Thisbe, Lucretia and Porcia, convey very different messages.

Thisbe stabbed herself to death with the sword of her lover Pyramus, having found him apparently dead; Lucretia killed herself after rape to recover her lost honour; Porcia reputedly committed suicide by swallowing live coals after hearing of the death of her husband, Brutus, in battle.

The following six lines of the verse, which seem never to have been translated fully, make clear that suicide was also Lemon's fate. In spite of the 'thousand great lords' who had honoured her, the verse continues:

But I burned for them. [And] If they will weep for me
My last lover made proof of my fidelity.
By a shot of flame and strange consequences
Since a lightning strike from Mars deprived him of the day
With a similar blast of fire reigniting my love
I killed myself to censure and to praise.³⁵

The lines create a new image of Lemon: that of a passionate and devoted mistress who shot herself for love, choosing the same death as that of her most recent lover. A concluding line from Virgil's *Eclogues* encapsulates the message of the verses: '*Omnia vincit Amor & nos cedamus Amori*' ('Love conquers everything and we must yield to love').

Given the reference to Mars, the verse suggests that Lemon killed herself after the death of her unnamed lover in battle. But when and where? The First Civil War in England raged from the summer of 1642 to 1646. The date of Hollar's print establishes a *terminus ante quem*: by 1646 Lemon was dead. This, however, was not the only war involving English soldiers. In 1640 there was fighting on the border with Scotland, as the King attempted to crush the Scottish Covenanters in the second of the two 'Bishops' Wars'. From 1641 onwards a bitter war was also being fought in Ireland in a revolt there against English and Protestant rule. Lemon's lover – and Lemon herself as a consequence – could have died in any of one of the engagements fought during these years.

A search of *Early English Books Online*, which covers both books and newsletters for the period, produces no relevant information for the name Margaret Lemon or Leman.³⁶ Parish records, however, reveal two possibilities. The first is a 'Margaret Leamon' buried at St Dunstan in the East, London, on 25th October 1642 – which was two days after the Battle of Edgehill – but since her father's name was given in the register she can be presumed to have been a child.³⁷ The second is 'Margarett Lemon buried December 15 [1643]' at St Peter in the East, Oxford.³⁸ From the autumn of 1642 to April 1646 Oxford was the base for the King's administration, army, court and loyal supporters, many hundreds

²⁹ Grosvenor and Rutherford, *op. cit.* (note 16), p.33.

³⁰ I am indebted to Karen Schaffers for providing this information in advance of the publication of K. Schaffers: *Portrait Miniatures in the Frits Lugt Collection*, Paris 2017. See also D. Foksett: *Samuel Cooper and his Contemporaries*, London 1974, p.7, where the miniature is dated 1635.

³¹ R. Valerie Lucas: "'Hic Mulier': The female transvestite in early modern England", *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 24, 1 (1988), pp.68–71 and 74–75.

³² E. Larsen: *The Paintings of Van Dyck*, Freren 1988, I, p.356. That Van Dyck was in poor health by the summer of 1639 is indicated by a reference to him visiting Bath that August, Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.11.

³³ James, *ODNB*, *op. cit.* (note 3).

³⁴ In 1644, his work having dried up in war-torn England, Hollar had moved to Antwerp. There he supported himself by producing etchings created from sketches he had brought from England for publication as prints. The print of Lemon was no doubt primarily a commercial project. The verses must have been added with the

intention of advertising her celebrity in England to prospective Flemish purchasers.

³⁵ 'Mais ie bruslay pour Eux. S'ils pleurerent pour moy / Et mon dernier Amant fait preue de ma Foy. / Par un transport de Flamme & des effects Étranges / Car un foudre de Mars l'ayant priué du jour / D'un mesme traict de feu renflamant mon Amour / Je m'immolay moy mesme au blasme & Louanges'. Author's translation.

³⁶ www.eebo.chadwyck.com. However, a 'Mrs Lemmon', listed after other such reprobates as the Lord Belly-god, the Lord Lye-a-bed and the Mr Sack-pot, appears in W.B.: *Triall of the Ladies. Hide Park, May Day, or the Yellow Books Partner*, London 1656, British Library, London, Thomason Tracts, 132 E. 878 (2), p.3, a diatribe against the vanity of May Day celebrations in London. By that time Lemon was dead, but perhaps her notoriety had become part of popular myth.

³⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, St Dunstan in the East, composite register, 1558–1653, P69/DUN1/A/001/MSO7857 item 001, www.ancestry.com (accessed 20th October 2016).

³⁸ Oxfordshire History Centre, St Peter in the East, composite register PAR 213/1/R1/1, fol. 164, www.ancestry.com (accessed 20th October 2016).



4. *Margaret Lemon*, by Anthony van Dyck. c.1638. Canvas, 93.3 by 77.8 cm. (Royal Collection Trust / © H.M. Queen Elizabeth II 2018).

of whom had fled there from parliamentary-held areas. Given Lemon's reputed popularity with the 'thousand great lords', she might well have been one of their number. 'Margarett Lemon' was buried one day after the news reached Oxford on 14th December of the shattering defeat the previous day – with many losses – of a royalist force at Alton in Hampshire by a parliamentary army under Sir William Waller.³⁹

Using the date of the Oxford burial as the only available lead to Lemon's apparently unrecorded suicide produces results. Perhaps predictably, no royalist newsletter from Oxford mentions her suicide, but *Certain Informations from severall parts of the Kingdoms, 18th–23rd December*, printed in parliamentary London, published information that it had learned on 22nd December, which includes details of just such a death:

And it is further reported from thence [i.e. Oxford] that the Lady Butler, a famous Curtizan, hearing that one Captaine Giles Porter her Paramour, was wounded at Aulton, in Hantshire, by some of Sir William Waller's men, at their late enterprise there, she desperately took a pistoll that was charged with powder and bullet, fired at her breast, and therewith killed herself. This lady, as it is reported, hath been a knowne strumpet for many years past, and hath used sometimes to walke the streets in mans apparel, and hath been maintained in the height of glory and excesse; and, *Qualis vita, finis ita*. [‘Such the life, so the end’].⁴⁰

This information is confirmed by a second source. A private letter written on Thursday 14th December in Oxford to Lord Loughborough, commander of the royalist forces in Leicestershire, reported that ‘the Lady Butler’ had ‘shot herself to death with a pistol’ in Magdalen College ‘that afternoon’.⁴¹ The Magdalen location of the suicide suggests a link to the burial of ‘Margarett Lemon’ at St Peter's in the East, since that was Magdalen's parish church.

The naming of the Oxford suicide as ‘the Lady Butler’ by two independent sources would seem to rule out any connection to either ‘Margarett Lemon’ or Van Dyck's Margaret Lemon, but no such Lady Butler who committed suicide on 14th December – or any other day – in Oxford can be traced.⁴² Evidence that the two sources were most probably referring to Margaret Lemon can be found, perhaps unexpectedly, in a literary source. *Theophania: or Severall Modern Histories Represented by Way of Romance: and Politickly Discours'd Upon* is a royalist roman à clef, published anonymously in 1655, but apparently written during the period 1644–46.⁴³ As the title suggests, under the guise of a heroic and chivalric romance set in an imagined Sicily (representing England), the work discussed political issues – above all, the causes of the Civil Wars and the means to resolve the conflict. The correspondences between the fictional characters and their real-life counterparts are fairly easily deduced from the pseudonyms used throughout the work. These

are almost entirely derived either from the names of appropriate historical figures from classical antiquity, or include approximate anagrams of the names of the characters they represent.

Theophania's plot, an indistinguishable mixture of fact and fiction, includes the telling of three retrospective narratives. The third of these is the tragic ‘Story of Monelia’, as told by her devoted but chaste lover, Clorimantes.⁴⁴ As Clorimantes explains, both he and Perrotus were soldiers in the royalist army, based at Nicosia (Oxford). Bonded by comradeship in arms, they forged an inseparable friendship. Both fell passionately in love with the ‘resplendent’ and virtuous beauty Monelia, who was descended from an illustrious and wealthy noble family. Their friendship was so strong that it survived even when Monelia fell in love with Perrotus and married him. Ordered out on an expedition, Perrotus was slain in an ensuing skirmish. On hearing the news, Monelia, having ascertained where in his body Perrotus had received his fatal wounds, stabbed herself to death in the same places in order to share his fate. Calling out ‘I come Perrotus’, she died in Clorimantes's arms, but not before she had demanded he seek to avenge her death. This was an end that, for contemporary readers, would have conjured up the image of the chaste wifely heroines of classical antiquity, such as Porcia, who demonstrated their love and their honour by their ultimate sacrifice.

Two contemporary keys to the identification of *Theophania's* characters are known. In the longer and more detailed one, the identity of Perrotus is simply given as ‘Mr Porter’; which of the several royalist Porters prominent at the time is unfortunately not specified. Monelia, on the other hand, is described more fully as ‘Mistris Leman who killed herself at Oxon’.⁴⁵ *Theophania's* account of Monelia stabbing herself in order to die from the same wounds as her husband, Perrotus, echoes the description on the Hollar print of Lemon's death by shooting as well as the accounts in the newsletter and the private letter. Given these corroborating details, it would seem highly likely that Monelia was Margaret Lemon.

Perrotus, or Mr Porter, can be identified with some confidence as the Giles Porter described by *Certain Informations* as mortally wounded at Alton. Another newsletter, *The Scottish Dove*, reporting on the news from Alton, stated that ‘Collonell Porter (either son, or neere kinsman to Endimion Porter) is taken Prisoner . . . he was so cly [sic] wounded so that it is not beleevied he will live’.⁴⁶ Giles Porter (b.1611) was in fact not the son but the youngest brother of Endymion. Almost nothing is known of his life except that he was unmarried and was recorded as serving as a captain in the army in 1640. He was in York with the army in the summer of that year and is reckoned to have died aged thirty-two or thirty-three, around 1643. Given Richard Symonds's mention of a ‘Porter’ who kept company with Lemon in Van Dyck's house, it seems most likely that Giles was both that man and the reported paramour of the

³⁹ *Narration of the Great Victory . . . Obtained by the Parliaments Forces under Sir William Waller at Alton, London 16 Dec. 1643*, British Library, London, Thomason Tracts, E. 78[22]. Alton is some fifty-five miles south of Oxford.

⁴⁰ *Certain Informations from Severall Parts of the Kingdome, 18–23 December*, no.49, London 1643, British Library, London, Thomason Tracts, E.79[8], p. 386.

⁴¹ Letter from P. Kinder to Henry Hastings, Lord Loughborough, at Ashby de la Zouch, 14th December 1643, *Historical Manuscripts Commission: Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Reginald Rawdon Hastings*, London 1930, II, p.111.

⁴² The parish registers for Oxford – admittedly incomplete – do not list a Lady Butler buried in the city during the First Civil War. A Lady Gratian[a] Butler, the

wife of the royalist army colonel John Cochrane, was probably in Oxford by the summer of 1643 but she was still alive in the early 1650s, see *Commons Journal*, III, p.146; and B. Morgan: ‘Sir John Cochrane (b. c.1604, d. in or after 1657), army officer and diplomat’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com, accessed 20th October 2017). Of the thirteen Butler knights created since 1603 only Sir William Butler, killed at Cropredy Bridge in 1644, might have stayed in Oxford with his wife, Joan, but she was still alive in 1646, see *Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding*, London 1889–92, II, pp.1462–63. Perhaps the reports confused Lemon with Endymion Porter's wife, Olivia, née Boteler, or Butler. She was certainly in Oxford in 1643 together with several of



5. *Margaret Lemon as Erminia*, by Anthony van Dyck. Late 1630s. Canvas, 109.2 by 129.5 cm. (Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire).

suicide.⁴⁷ Clorimantes, alone of all the main characters in *Theophania's* 'Story of Monelia', escapes identification in either key. Given the emotional intensity of the tale, it seems possible that he was the author of that narrative, and thus the author of the whole romance. At a time of dangerous political upheaval he might have thought it prudent to devise the only impenetrable pseudonym in the romance. But whoever he was, Clorimantes was obviously captivated by 'Monelia'.

But what of 'the Lady Butler'? It seems highly improbable that there were two women, Lady Butler and 'Mistris Leman',

who killed themselves in Oxford during the First Civil War following the death of their lover, Porter, in battle. There was, it can be argued, no actual Lady Butler involved in these accounts but that 'the Lady Butler' was the nickname – and quite possibly a scurrilous one – by which Lemon was popularly known and generally recognised in places as far apart as royalist Oxford, distant Leicestershire and even hostile London. 'The Lady Butler', Monelia and the Margaret Lemon buried at St Peter in the East on 15th December 1643 were all the same person: Margaret Lemon, Van Dyck's former mistress.

her six sisters, all of whom were co-heiresses of Lord William Boteler and married to leading members of the court. All sisters survived the First Civil War, see R.E. Chester Waters: *Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct family of Chester of Chicheley*, London 1878, I, pp.143–52.

⁴³ *Theophania: or Severall Modern Histories Represented by Way of Romance: and Politickly Discours'd Upon, by an English Person of Quality*, London 1655.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.192–206.

⁴⁵ *Theophania: Or Several Modern Histories Represented by Way of Romance, and Politickly Discours'd Upon*, ed. R. Pigeon, Ottawa 1999, p.323. The compiler of the key would seem to have expected that his readers would recognise the name

and the circumstances of the death without difficulty, but Pigeon fails to identify 'Mistris Leman'.

⁴⁶ *The Scottish Dove, Sent Out and Returning, Bringing Intelligence*, 9 (8th–15th December 1643), British Library, London, Thomason Tracts, E.78[20], pp.67 and 70.

⁴⁷ D. Townshend: *The Life and Letters of Endymion Porter*, London 1897, pp.10, 183 and 208; J. Rushworth: *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*, London 1721, III, p.1243, note 12.

These new details about Lemon's death add a little more evidence to the few facts previously known about her. They indicate that rather than remaining in London after Van Dyck's death, she moved at some point to Oxford, then the royalist capital of England.⁴⁸ There – living apparently in the privileged surroundings of Magdalen College, where courtiers, clergyman and officers of the royalist army were also lodging⁴⁹ – she might have continued to enjoy the favours of some at least of her 'thousand' noble admirers. Although the number is clearly poetic licence, those admirers evidently included *Theophania's* Perrotus as well as the devoted Clorimantes and perhaps a few more besides.⁵⁰ The newsletter's account of her impetuous suicide – having a loaded pistol to hand – would seem to corroborate Hollar's reported description of a 'dangerous woman' liable to threaten physical violence.

The claim of *Certain Informations* that 'the Lady Butler' sometimes walked the streets of London dressed as a man sounds likely enough to have been Lemon, given the supporting evidence of Cooper's portrait. The miniature might have represented more than artistic fantasy; it could have represented a known and scandalous practice of Lemon's. *Certain Informations* described 'the Lady Butler' as famous around London as a 'strumpet' who 'for many years' lived in the height of prosperity, or 'glory and excesse'. This offers yet more evidence that Lemon's career as a courtesan predated her relationship with Van Dyck and continued after it had ended.

This new evidence also raises questions about the ending of her relationship with Van Dyck. Did Van Dyck find a wife, not so much to detach him from a stressful mistress, but to fill a vacancy? Had they ended their affair by mutual consent some time earlier? Lemon's companionship with 'Porter' had begun while she was living in Van Dyck's house. Giles Porter, recorded in the army in 1640, was quite probably an officer in the army that had been assembled for the First Bishops' War in 1639. It is possible that Lemon had already left Van Dyck – perhaps to his relief and even with his encouragement – to follow Porter to the war in the North as early as 1639. This scenario thus offers a new insight to the portrait of Lemon as Erminia. With the painting's prominent Cupid so clearly compelling Erminia to go to the aid of her lover, it could be viewed not so much as a portrait set in literary fiction, but as evidence for a new relationship in Lemon's life, one that documents her – perhaps amicable – separation from Van Dyck.⁵¹

Celebrated, or indeed notorious while she lived, Margaret Lemon has left almost no record of her life, apart from a handful of fine portraits created when she was Van Dyck's mistress, as well as a number of copies of those paintings by unidentified artists, workshop assistants and printmakers.⁵² Thanks chiefly, however, to two literary works – the verse by the unidentified 'R. G. Sr. D. L.' appended to Hollar's 1646 print of 'Marguerite Lemon Angloise' and *Theophania* by a second



6. *Margaret Lemon*, by Samuel Cooper. ?1635–37. Watercolour on vellum, height 12.1 cm. (Fondation Custodia, Paris).

unidentified author – it has been possible to find clues to her hitherto untraced end. Both sources present a highly idealised picture of Lemon, one that elevates her in death to the status of a heroine of classical antiquity or mythology. In the verse she appears as the epitome of youth, beauty, passion and fidelity; in *Theophania* she represents the ideal of the chaste and honourable Roman matron. In *Certain Informations* she appears – probably more accurately – as a courtesan who lived beyond the bounds of conventional respectability, one whose violent death paralleled the excesses of her life. But in none of these was she commemorated as the mistress of Van Dyck. Her importance in Van Dyck's life and for his art should not, therefore, be exaggerated. On the other hand, these newly discovered sources suggest that during her life Margaret Lemon – also known as the Lady Butler – was a striking personality in her own right, perhaps the most famous and admired courtesan of her day, a woman of beauty, spirit and independence of character, but one whose passionate temperament led to an early and tragic end. *Qualis vita, finis ita*.

⁴⁸ J. Barratt: *Cavalier Capital: Oxford in the English Civil War, 1642–46*, Solihull 2015, pp.36, 39, 87.

⁴⁹ Magdalen College, Oxford, Archives, CS/40/9/1–3, Lists of 'strangers' in residence at Magdalen [January 1644], i.e. just after Lemon's death.

⁵⁰ Hollar apparently visited Oxford in 1643, see Turner, *op. cit.* (note 1), no.436,

pp.105–06, plan of Oxford and distant views inscribed 'W. Hollar Bohem. fecit 1643'.

⁵¹ The version of the original portrait showing Lemon grasping a sword (note 20), might also refer to her involvement with the armies of 1639 and 1640.

⁵² Barnes *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.551–52, lists the copies of the Van Dyck portraits in oils.