

**“Such an intruder on the rights of men”: The Poetry of Anne Finch,
Countess of Winchilsea**

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Abstract

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661-1720) lived and wrote in a period when the borders of the literary tradition were determined by good education, good taste and deep learning. Her concern in being a woman poet is in the core of most of her poems. In her highly acknowledged poem “The Introduction” she ironically characterizes a woman poet who wants to write poetry as “an intruder on the rights of men.” The article therefore aims at a study of a selection of Finch’s poems that are dominated with her ideas about being a woman poet. When the world that she is living in fails to fulfill her yearnings as a woman poet, she creates an imaginary realm for herself where she can raise her poetic voice primarily with the aim of questioning, criticizing and discussing the roles assigned to women. In the face of the cultural, social and literary restrictions before a woman, Finch in these poems, through her ironic and even humorous statements, reveals how difficult it is for a woman to write and cope with the hostile remarks about her art. Furthermore, these poems also reveal Finch’s determination to write despite all the restrictions that discourage the women poets.

Keywords: Anne Finch, Winchilsea, women poets of the late seventeenth century, Augustan period, “The Introduction”.

Öz

Winchilsea Kontesi, Anne Finch (1661-1720) edebiyat geleneğinin sınırlarının iyi eğitim, ince bir zevk ve derin bir bilgi ile belirlendiği bir dönemde yaşamış ve şiirler yazmıştır. Kadın şair olma hakkındaki görüşleri pek çok şiirinin özünü oluşturmaktadır. Tanınmış şiiri “The Introduction”da şiir yazmak isteyen kadın şairi, kinayeli bir şekilde, “erkeklerin haklarını ihlal eden kişi” olarak adlandırır. Söz konusu çalışmanın amacı Finch’in kadın şair olma konusu hakkındaki görüşlerini dile getirdiği şiirleri incelemektir. Anne Finch, yaşamakta olduğu dünya bir kadın şair olarak yapmak istediklerine imkan vermediği ve beklentilerini

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karşılamađı an, kendisi için hayali bir mekan yaratır. Yarattığı bu hayali mekandan bir şair olarak sesini yükselterek çağlar boyu kadınlara uygun görülmüş olan rolleri sorgular, eleştirir ve tartışır. Ayrıca, bir kadının bu rollerden sıyrılabilmesinin ne denli güç olduğunu da dile getirir. Finch incelenen şiirlerinde, kimi zaman nükteli, kimi zamansa kinayeli bir üslupla, kültürel, sosyal ve edebi kısıtlamalara rağmen kadın şair olmanın ne demek olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, bu şiirlerin genelinde bir kadın olarak yazmanın güçlükleri ve kadın şairin sanatına yapılan yıkıcı eleştirilerle nasıl baş etmek durumunda kaldığı gibi konular da tartışılmaktadır. Sözkonusu şiirler aynı zamanda tüm kısıtlamalar karşısında Finch’in bir kadın olarak şiir yazma konusundaki kararlılığını ifade etmeleri açısından da dikkat çekicidir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Anne Finch, Winchilsea, on yedinci yüzyıl sonu kadın şairler, Augustan dönemi, “The Introduction”.

“Such an intruder on the rights of men,” the line from Anne Finch’s poem “The Introduction,” in very brief terms, reveals how a woman poet is perceived to be in an age and in a literary tradition the borders of which are determined by good education, good taste and deep learning. It also provides the frame of the article that aims at illustrating how a woman poet becomes an intruder and how she gives way to her intrusion in the poetic tradition. Despite “the cultural suppression of female voices” Mermin thinks that many women wrote and even published in the eighteenth century, among whom she pays great tribute to Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn and Anne Finch (1990, p. 335). Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661-1720) was one of the highly recognised female literary figures of the late seventeenth century, whose reputation then gradually faded. Hinnant asserts that, in the early nineteenth century, William Wordsworth’s “famous comments in his “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*” and in two of his letters to Alexander Dyce” contributed to a revival of Anne Finch’s recognition (1994, p. 26). In his letter to Dyce, among her other poems mainly two of them; “Petition for an Absolute Retreat” and “A Nocturnal Reverie” are described by Wordsworth as “of much superior merit” (1969, p. 380). Anne Finch circulated her poems in manuscript form and she published a volume of her poems in 1713, first without her name, then with her name but excluding the more personal poems. She wrote in popular forms of her day like love lyric, satire, fable, Pindaric ode, meditation on nature, religious poems and drama (Rogers and McCarthy, 1987, pp. 77-78). Williamson suggests that manuscript circulation of women poets is quite different from the male poets’, because men are more ambitious in their poetry to attract the attention of patrons and clients. Women’s poetry aims less at public recognition and less ambitious than that of men, and they aim at addressing, a relatively small community (1990, p. 126). The other reason for Finch’s preference of her poems to remain as manuscripts is that, publication is regarded “as a kind of sexual self-display” (Mermin,

1990, p. 336) and such a public opinion, discouraged many women from writing poetry to share their private feelings and homely subjects in an age when poetry was regarded as a public matter. For Mermin, the reason why the women poets are shy about their works being exposed is that “their works and their selves are so often confused with each other” (1990, p. 336).

In the face of all these limitations, in Anne Finch’s case in particular, addressing a small audience is what a woman poet can safely do. Finch gives voice to her concern in this issue in “Mercury and the Elephant: A *Prefatory Fable*”¹ where Mercury, the messenger god, does not want to bother himself with the complaints of the elephant who defeated a boar and “gain’d the Prize / From a wild Boar of monstrous Size” yet not received the respect it deserved. The elephant wonders what the gods are thinking about its condition, but it is all in vain. Finch’s first collection *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions, Written by a Lady* begins with this poem, and as Williamson suggests, Finch uses the fable “to represent the predicament of the woman writer” (1990, p. 113). The worries of the woman poet are not at all different from that of the elephant; both of them yearn and hope for respect but receive none, and nobody cares about their frustration. In the concluding section of the fable, Finch, as a woman poet, explains why she writes and to whom she writes. She does not aim at high poetic success, nor wants public appraisal for her poetry, but as will be observed in her selected poems, she modestly raises her poetic voice not for public notice and recognition, but rather for people who want to hear her poetry, and in particular to her friends:

What Men are not concern’d to know:
For still untouch’d how we succeed,
'Tis for themselves, not us, they *Read*;
Whilst that proceeding to requite,
We own (who in the Muse delight)
'Tis for our Selves, not them, we *Write*.²

In addition to the difficulties of gaining recognition in and having an access to the poetic tradition, the woman poet also has to cope with the imposed ideas of inferiority, that is associated with her gender. Nevertheless, as Gilbert and Gubar think, the women who wanted to write, “were evidently infected or sickened by just the feelings of self-

¹ “Mercury and the Elephant.” Retrieved June 17, 2007, from <http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/AnneFinch/Website/Poems/Mercuryandtheelephant.htm>

² The poems cited are taken from different sources as stated in the footnotes. Therefore, all (some shorter ones in particular) may not have line numbers for they are quoted in the way they appear in the sources they are taken from.

doubt, inadequacy, and inferiority that their education in "femininity" almost seems to have been designed to induce." They further suggest that, women were faced with the common idea that female intellect and creativity is sterile, and they are regarded as "powerless intellectual eunuchs" (1984, p. 60). Along with the concerns for respectability and a distrust in the intellectual capabilities of women, the already existing male-dominated literary tradition and the "traditional subject-object" divisions in poetry narrowed the scope of women's writing, in this respect what the woman poet has to do is "to redefine woman's position in poetry: to become the subject who desires and speaks" (Mermin, 1990, pp. 352, 351).

Therefore, this study will concentrate on Finch's selection of poems, in which she reveals her concerns about being a woman poet – "an intruder" – in the poetic tradition, and will examine how she redefines her status as a woman poet, at times through complaint, at times through humor. The common point in these poems is the woman poet's struggle to find a means to adjust herself to the poetic tradition where a woman is constantly presented as the object, the source of inspiration, commonly appearing as muse or beloved, yet silent. In the face of the cultural, social and literary impositions and restrictions put before a woman, Finch through her ironic and even humorous statements about what it means to be a woman poet, reveals her attempts to find a proper medium of expression, presents how difficult it is for a woman to write and cope with the hostile remarks about her art, but above all she expresses her determination to write. The woman poet is living in a world where everything is named by man, and this tradition is as ancient as human history. In "Adam Pos'd"³ Anne Finch presents Adam "our First Father" as naming things that he sees around. He is the one who has speech and authority and he is also the one who names the "Fantastick Nymph" who is Eve: "T'have guest from what New Element she came; / T'have hit the wav'ring Form, or giv'n this Thing a Name." For Adam, Eve is a new element, somehow an intruder in his world, just like a woman poet in the poetic tradition. Mermin thinks that in the world where man names everything, in order to speak first, the women poets "prefer to name themselves" and this name is not their real names, nor it is their fathers' and husbands' names but "genuinely their own" as in the case of Anne Finch who on some occasions uses the pseudonym Ardelia (1990, p. 347).

Being a woman poet in the late seventeenth century, as Mallinson argues, is to face constraints and the "combination woman/poet presents at various times a paradox, a mystery, a scandal an oxymoron, and a triumph" and this concern haunts Finch's poetry (1990, p. 40). The presentation of these constraints along with the ways offered to cope

³ "Adam Pos'd." Retrieved May 25, 2007, from <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/finch/1713/mp-adam.html>

with all, constitutes the central theme in most of her poems. Therefore, Finch's highly acknowledged and often quoted poem, "The Introduction"⁴ makes a good introduction to discuss the woman poet's place in the public as she sees it. The woman poet's writing and submitting poetry to public view is dangerous for it will receive accusations and criticisms or even insults, for the poetic world is a man's terrain:

Did I, my lines intend for public view,
How many censures, would their faults pursue,
Some would, because such words they do affect,
Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect.
And many have attained, dull and untaught
The name of wit, only by finding fault.
True judges, might condemn their want of wit,
And all might say, they're by a woman writ.
Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,
The fault, can by no virtue be redeemed. (1-12)

Finch's concerns and her questioning of the traditional gender roles assigned to women and men are also in the core of the poem. While the world of letters is associated with men, "Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play" (14) is what is seen as suitable for women. Also the domestic duties "the dull manage of a servile house" is the only "art" proper for women (19-20). Finch makes a reference to women's singing and celebrating King David through a reference to the Biblical story in the Old Testament, and thinks that in the ancient times, on certain occasions, women had more active roles in participating in the public occasions by raising their voices through the songs they sang. She talks about people, women in particular, celebrating the return of the Ark, and thus presents how women, "the fairest half" are by Heaven given "some share of wit and poetry" (43, 22-24). She aims at showing woman's ability to write by giving examples from Bible, and as Rogers suggests though they "may not appear very convincing today" in Finch's time "the Bible was constantly used to keep woman in her place" (1998, pp. 234-235). Furthermore, apart from adding a new perspective by presenting the active role of women, Hinnant emphasizes another aspect of Finch's use of Biblical figures, and he states that "Finch celebrates Biblical figures who are symbolic of a different kind of art: a heroic and religious poetry of national rejoicing and unity" and they are the "emblems of a poetry that encounters no resistance" (1994, p. 75). Although Finch through this Biblical parallel states that women who attempt at writing poetry encounter

⁴ "The Introduction." In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (pp. 78-79).

more restrictions in her time, she emphasizes that they should raise their voices if not on public occasions as they used to, but in the private sphere – at the cost of being regarded as “presumptuous.”

The major difference, for Finch, between the male and female world is marked by education. The difference between a man and a woman’s intellectual capacity is not a matter of inferiority or superiority in creation. It is due to poor education and that women are excluded from the world of intellect, learning and poetry:

How are we fallen, fallen by mistaken rules?
And Education’s, more than Nature’s fools,
Debarred from all improvements of the mind,
And to be dull, expected and designed. . . . (51-55)

As a consequence of poor education, woman with her “contracted wing” (61) cannot achieve a high metaphoric flight in poetry. She is not also allowed to enter in the “groves of laurel” (63), that is, the world of poetry, but only “shades” (64) are the places proper for her; the shades that are away from the bright world of poetry. Salvaggio comments on the significance of the recurrent use of shade in Finch’s poetry and suggests that the shade, a place neither in the light nor in the darkness, is a world far from that of Enlightenment that belongs to man. She puts forward that for Anne Finch “shade was not simply a retreat, but the process of radical displacement that was hers both as a ‘woman’ who wrote, and as a poet who wrote ‘woman’” (1998, pp. 243-244). Salvaggio appreciates Finch’s place in the poetic tradition as the one who is “displaced” among the major literary figures of the English Enlightenment stating that:

Finch was a woman clearly displaced within and from her culture, but she was also a woman whose writing—in voicing and celebrating that displacement – became a feminine process that exceeded both Enlightenment systems and the larger classical structures that they epitomized. (1998, p. 244)

For a woman poet with contracted wings, only private poetry, which can be enjoyed among “some few friends” (63) is seen suitable. Finch in “The Introduction” moves in between the reality and the culturally constructed idea of femininity, and presents what she thinks to be the ideal one with referring to instances from history that mark women’s glory. Still, how a woman is displaced and how she is entrapped within the narrow definitions of femininity and how she tries to capture a moment of poetic glory, though in the shade, is Finch’s major concern fully expressed in “The Introduction.” For Hinnant, in the poem Finch acknowledges “the power of a hostile system of gender-based assumptions” and through a “combination of personal reflection and ethical discourse, she is able to construct a historical schema by which this system is seen as a lapse from a lost ideal” (1994, p. 74).

“On Myself”⁵ is another poem where Finch further elaborates on her wish for shade. Finch thanks God for she is “designed” and “framed” as “the weaker kind.” Although she calls herself as the weaker sex, it is quite ironic that she sees it as a prestigious state, for unlike men who are all concerned with the “trifles” of life, she thinks that her soul is “rescued” from all such concerns. She has “pleasures, and praise” but wonders what would happen if they disappear. She then reveals her determination to live with what she has in hand. Finch modestly puts forward the conditions that woman is faced with and her ability to adjust herself to all, though it would require a life in the shade:

... I on myselfe can live,
And slight those aids unequal chance does give.
When in the sun, my wings can be displayed,
And in retirement, I can bless the shade.

Finch’s modesty evident in “On Myself” in a similar manner marks the beginning of “The Appology.”⁶ Finch wonders about the rules of writing. The title is quite ironic, for it is not an apology for her writing but rather a statement of purpose of her choice of the pen. Since there are no established rules for a woman’s writing, and since woman is deprived of everything related to her choice, Finch feels that as a woman poet she has “[t]o follow through the Groves a wand’ring Muse / And fain’d Idea’s for [her] pleasures chuse.” Salvaggio suggests that Finch associates the wandering muse with herself, for she as a poet wanders through the shade, a world that “seems to complement her own feminine deviations from the fixed world of pure light or darkness” (1998, p. 248). Finch states her choice of writing unlike other women who enjoy make up: “Why shou’d it in my Pen be held a fault / Whilst Mira paints her face, to paint a thought.” She marks her difference from other women who spend their time with trivial things, and wonders why writing poetry is considered “a thing so vain” for a woman. For Hinnant, Finch suggests that her verses are “no more harmful than cosmetics or artificial stimulants” (1994, p. 75). However, she shares one thing with other women, the weakness that is attributed to her sex. Her “weaknesse” is “still to write tho’ hopelesse to succeed” and despite all, she insists in writing.

A similar determination to write is also presented in “To Mr. F[inch] Now Earl of W[inchilsea],”⁷ and as the subtitle to the poem indicates, her husband wishes her to write

⁵ “On Myself.” In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (p. 81).

⁶ “The Appology.” Retrieved May 25, 2007, from <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/finch/1903/fa-appology.html>

⁷ “To Mr. F[inch] Now Earl of W[inchilsea].” In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (pp. 82-85).

for him some verses when he is away. Finch uses a pastoral setting for the poem that is reminiscent of the shady groves of the wandering muse in "The Introduction," and she uses the pastoral names Ardelia for herself, and Flavio for the Earl. To fulfill Flavio's wish, and since time is short and she has to write poetry, Ardelia goes to Parnassus to ask for the help of the Muses, the common source of inspiration for the poets in the male poetic tradition. However, as it is an unusual case for a woman to ask for the help of the Muses, they refuse her. The Muses are so startled with what Ardelia asked from them that their exclamation "A *husband!* echoed all around" (37), a word that had never been echoed before. With amazement and shock they decide to call up a council and discuss the matter there. The duty of the Muses is to inspire poems that would address "the public ear" (47) and they give inspiration to the gentlemen who gather in coffee houses and who wear the clothes of "common sense" (53). Mallinson states that, in Restoration poetry, "the dominant strain in love poetry was illicit and often licentious" however, in contrast she relates Finch's love poems to the earlier tradition, that of Sidney and Spenser "which praise fidelity in love" (1990, p. 48). So the Muses send their excuses to Ardelia for they cannot help her with such an unusual wish. Only Urania, the muse of heavenly love, gives advice to her, that is, to write from her heart. For the female poet, it is not the commonly accepted sources of inspiration and poetic tradition but her heart is the true source of inspiration:

Enough! the pleased ARDELIA cried:
And slighting every Muse beside,
Consulting now her breast,
Perceived that every tender thought,
Which from abroad she'd vainly sought,
Did there in silence rest. . . . (79-84)

The poem that she is to write, will again address a private audience, only to Flavio "For since the world does so despise / Hymen's endearments and its ties," (91-92). She writes a poem about what she has in her heart and could share its secrecy not with public but only with the one who is so close to her, that is her husband. Such poetry is quite suitable for the woman poet who does not want to expose her private feelings to public gaze and deal with love – but of married love that would not harm her chastity.

The Muses who refuse to inspire a woman poet appear again in "From the Muses at Parnassus,"⁸ but with a new role assigned to them. As the title to the poem indicates they are presented as "authors" and they "make the verses rather than inspire the poet to

⁸ "From the Muses at Parnassus." Retrieved June 5, 2007, from <http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/AnneFinch/Website/Poems/fromthemusesatparnassus.htm>

write” (Keith, 1998, p. 468). In the poem the Muses gather not at the real Parnassus, their traditional dwelling place, as the subtitle to the poem indicates, but at “a hill so call’d in Eastwell Park” to congratulate Lady Maidston on her son Lord Winchilsea’s birthday – who is Charles Finch, the nephew of Finch’s husband (Keith, 1998, p. 468). The Muses are very happy for being there, and they receive much pleasure from Lady Maidston’s Parnassus:

Since from your own Parnassus, they receive
Pelasure’s, which theirs in Phocis, never game;
And own, whilst here they reach the height of blisse,
Their forked hill, was but a type of this.
See where they come, their brows with lawrel bound,
And hear the neighbouring woods, repeat the sound,
Of silver harps, and voices that proclame
To all the expecting world, his growing fame,
Whom you, this day, presented to the earth,
Whilst Heav’n look’d down, and smil’d, upon the birth.

The Muses join in the celebration of Lord Winchilsea with their harps and song. On Finch’s use of classical figures in her poetry, Keith argues that, Finch generally omits “classical sources of inspiration that exclude the woman poet” but sometimes as in the case of her presentation of the Muses in this particular poem she “appropriates the muses of classical authority for another purpose: to identify with rather than invoke them, thereby effecting a rhetorical substitution between the caller and the called upon” (1998, p. 468). In this respect it is quite ironic to see how Finch reverses the roles of the one who is inspired and the one who inspires. The young Lord becomes the source of inspiration and it is the Muses who with this inspiration sing their song of celebration.

In “The Circuit of Apollo”⁹ another classical authority, this time the god of poetry, Apollo, appears and he is to decide who the best poet is among four women. The best would be rewarded with a wreath that is the symbol of poetic achievement. Apollo is so sad to hear that Aphra Behn died, for he acknowledges her to be “superior in fancy” (13). So what he has to do is to make his choice among Alinda, Laura, Valeria and Ardelia. Finch’s poetic self, Ardelia, who is “expecting least praise, / Who writ for her pleasure and not for the bays” (43-44) is the last one to display her talent in front of Apollo. However, Apollo decides not to make a choice, and gives equal tribute to all four women:

⁹ “The Circuit of Apollo.” In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (pp. 93-95).

Since in wit, or in beauty, it never was heard,
One female could yield t' have another preferred,
He changed his design, and divided his praise,
And said that they all had a right to bays,
And that t'were injustice, one brow to adorn,
With a wreath, which so fitly by each might be worn. (60-65)

Apollo is so proud about what he has done that he "applauded his art" (66). Without giving the laurel wreath to any one of the four women – for they all deserved but there is only one wreath – he indeed gives it to none, and recognizes none of them as the best poet. In his praise for Behn he uses a similar tactic, for he directs the best of his praises to a worthy literary woman, but who is dead. The poem, as Hinnant suggests is "in a sense, a staging – in a disguised, fictive form – of the discourse of male gallantry and flattery. It is the obverse side of the misogynistic reception that Finch initially expected her poetry to receive after it was published" (1994, p. 13). After thinking that he successfully managed the situation, and thinking that he spent a lot of time, he leaves off for more important daily concerns like to "go drive on the day" (71). However, the poem ends in a quite ironic tone for though in the title it is suggested that it is the "Circuit" of Apollo where he is supposed to make a judgment, it is indeed Finch who makes the judgment by calling him "so imprudent, so dull, or so blind" (76) and on his behalf to all who do not show any respect to women's poetry.

A similarly arrogant Apollo appears in "Upon Ardelia's Return Home."¹⁰ With a humorous tone, Finch again presents the condition of the woman poet and how vulnerable, yet how creative, she could be in the face of assaults. Ardelia after a long walk in Eastwell Park, feels very tired and wants to return home. The park that she wanders in is reminiscent of the groves that symbolize poetry, and it is at this place that she comes across Apollo and asks him whether he could take her to his chariot. However, Apollo refuses her, because he says that Pegasus will be disgraced "[t]o lett a female rider pace him." Instead he advises her to take the water cart that is waiting in the shade, which he thinks to be a much more suitable vehicle for her. Ardelia goes home with the water cart, but with her poetic imagination, she creates a glorious chariot out of the water cart:

And with th'invention which he gave her
She might convert wou'd she not spare itt
This Roulo to triumphant Charret

¹⁰ "Upon Ardelia's Return Home." Retrieved June 10, 2007, from http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/anne_finchwebsite/poems/uponardeliasreturnhome.htm

Turn wood to steel and ropes to Leather
And forehead bough to Ostrich Feather
Since all was as opinion made itt
Not as the Artist hane ore-laid itt.

Mallinson thinks that “the poem plays, through burlesque, on the notion that women must be both compliant and resourceful in making do with second best” and in that respect it is possible to read it “as a playful commentary on her relation as a woman poet to literature” (1990, p. 75). Thus with the second best alternative, Ardelia adjusts herself to the condition and succeeds – at least returning home.

In “The Bird and the Arras”¹¹ the playful tone of the former poem leaves its place to a rather serious one. Doody characterizes the poem as “a brilliant delineation of confusion and frustration” (2000, p. 222). The poem is about the painful efforts of a bird trying to get out of the room where it is enclosed. Rogers sees the poem as an allegory and argues that “the bird imprisoned in a man-made room suggests a woman imprisoned in man-made conventions” (1998, p. 236). The poem, in line with what is suggested, exposes the plight of the woman poet entrapped within the restrictions of the poetic tradition through the description of a bird who is entrapped in a room and takes a “well-wrought Arras for a shade” and mistakes the tapestry for nature:

By near resemblance see that bird betrayed
Who takes the well wrought arras for a shade,
There hopes to perch and with a cheerful tune
O'er-pass the scorchings of the sultry noon.
But soon repulsed by the obdurate scene
How swift she turns, but turns alas in vain.
That piece a grove, this shows an ambient sky,
Where imitated fowl their pinions ply,
Seeming to mount in flight and aiming still more high.

The bird aims at reaching the grove, a common metaphor that Finch uses for poetry, but it is only an illusion – a tapestry. The bird wants to fly high, to reach the sky. But unlike in the bird metaphor that Finch used in “The Introduction” this particular bird in the poem does not have contracted wings; however, it is vulnerable to another form of restriction, the condition of being a prisoner. In both cases an escape, a flight, a poetic freedom is what they lack, yet what they deeply yearn for. The more it tries to escape the more it hits and hurts itself. It is hopelessly “fluttering in endless circles” in the enclosed

¹¹ “The Bird and the Arras.” In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (p. 93).

room until "some kind hands" help it and shows it the way, the bird succeeds to get out from the casement. It flies to the "ample space, the only Heaven of birds," not to the groves of laurel, but only to an ample space, that is metaphorically seen as proper for a woman poet. By making a reference to her other poems, about the concluding lines of "On Myself" in particular, Mallinson thinks that in Finch's poetry "the bird often occurs in figures of speech about herself" and she further thinks that the self through the metaphor of the bird appears as "an adaptable, undemanding creature, who at best accepts what circumstances bring, but does not initiate" (1990, p. 70).

The other poem in which Finch discusses the role of the poet and her wish to write poetry, through the presentation of another symbolic bird, is "To the Nightingale."¹² The poem begins with the celebration of the song of the nightingale, the "sweet harbinger of spring". The poet wants her song to be as free as the song of the nightingale: "Poets, wild as thee, were born, / Pleasing best when unconfined, / When to please is least designed" (7-9). She resembles herself to the nightingale because like the nightingale she wants to sing her song. Keith suggests that, Finch's "poetic self takes on the role of what is normally objectified in the poetic tradition: the bird." In many of her poems, Keith continues "it is through her identification with the bird that Finch repeatedly defends her authority to write by emphasizing the narrow range of her ability and poetic territory while calling on the bird's classical lyric associations as a trope of inspiration" (1998, p. 472). The poet does not join the joy of the song of the nightingale, nor does she intend to write a poem inspired by it. She realizes the limitation of a woman poet and how entrapped she is:

Cares do still their thoughts molest,
And still th' unhappy poet's breast,
Like thine, when best he sings, is placed against a thorn.
She begins, Let all be still!
Muse, thy promise now fulfill!
Sweet, oh! sweet, still sweeter yet
Can thy words such accents fit,
Canst thou syllables refine,
Melt a sense that shall retain
Still some spirit of the brain,
Till with sounds like these it join. (11-21)

¹² "To the Nightingale." In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (pp. 104-105).

A poet sings best when her heart aches, just like the nightingale that is presented as singing best when its breast is placed against a thorn. Keith thinks that the freedom that Finch argues is “paradoxically a constrained one, for the bird’s painful restriction produces its legendary song” (1998, p. 473). This idea of captivity is reminiscent of the condition of the woman poet entrapped within the convention that disabled her to raise her voice. Woman poet’s entrapped state can also be assessed in the light of the story of Procne and Philomela in Greek Mythology, where both the nightingale and the sparrow are depicted as suffering and singing their sad song. In order to be saved from the wrath of Tereus, Philomela is turned into a swallow and Procne to a nightingale by gods (in Roman Mythology it is the tongueless Philomela who is associated with the nightingale) (Hamilton, 1969, pp.270-271). The story emphasizes patriarchal imprisonment, violence and injustice on women and consequently their silencing. The birds’ sorrowful song and their vulnerable condition in the face of male oppression presented in the story metaphorically presents the similar condition of the woman poet, and her attempt at singing her song in the face of all difficulties.

Finch in “To the Nightingale” neither immortalizes her song nor the song of the nightingale. She cannot also join the song of the nightingale, because the poet comes to a realization of the difference between the nightingale singing and herself as a poet. Mallinson draws attention to the point that the poem “moves from aspiration to resignation” (1990, p. 71). The poem ends with the woman poet’s recognition; unlike the nightingale that has a song learned from the forest – a common metaphor for poetic world – the woman poet has only speech:

Thus we poets that have speech,
Unlike what thy forests teach,
If a fluent vein be shown
That’s transcendent to our own,
Criticize, reform, or preach,
Or censure what we cannot reach. (30-35)

The difference between the world of man and woman, the former associated with studies and the latter with nature, is vividly presented in “An Invitation to Dafnis.”¹³ The poem, as Mallinson states, “adapts the conventions of the seduction poem so popular with Cavalier and Restoration poets,” and as indicated from its refrain it is an invitation, but unlike the erotic associations in Cavalier poetry it is an invitation for “innocent mutual enjoyment of the pleasures of the countryside” (1990, pp. 49-50).

¹³ “An Invitation to Dafnis.” Retrieved May 26, 2007, from <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/finch/1903/fa-invitation.html>

Ardelia, as stated in the subtitle, wants Dafnis to leave "*To leave his study and usual Employments, - Mathematicks Paintings, etc*" aside and enjoy the beauties of nature with her in the "Arcadian plaine, / Warm without Sun, and shady without rain". The idyllic landscape that Ardelia invites Dafnis is far removed from the daily concerns of the contemporary life – the world that man lives in with its "busy compasses." The place that Ardelia invites him is away from the daily concerns of Dafnis, and she does not want his employments to prevent Dafnis from participating in the joy of this idyllic landscape:

Come, and lett Sansons World, no more engage,
Altho' he gives a Kingdom in a page;
O're all the Vniverse his lines may goe,
And not a clime, like temp'rate brittan show,
Come then, my Dafnis, and her feilds survey,
And throo' the groves, with your Ardelia stray.

The world that Dafnis belongs to is busy; it is the world of intellect, of social-political concerns, whereas the world of Ardelia is pastoral, idyllic and peaceful, and there is nothing but only the beauty of nature, there poetry is inspired and sung with the joy that one gets from nature. It is quite different from the one where everything is named by Adam:

Lett us my Dafnis, rural joys persue,
And Courts, or Camps, not ev'n in fancy view.
So, lett us throo' the Groves, my Dafnis stray,
And so, the pleasures of the feilds, survey.

Anne Finch, in her poems so far discussed, aims not at a retirement from the world of poetry but rather she tries to accommodate her poetry to a place that is left from man. A shade, an imaginary realm, an idyllic landscape far removed from the daily concerns of men is depicted as proper places for a woman poet where she can sing her private poetry.

The beauty of the natural world is further celebrated in "A Nocturnal Reverie."¹⁴ In his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815) Wordsworth singles out "A Nocturnal Reverie" and some passages of Alexander Pope's "Windsor Forest" for their use of nature stating that other than these exceptions "the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the 'Paradise Lost' and the 'Seasons' does not contain a single new image of external nature" (1967, p. 747). Salvaggio thinks that "Finch's shady world is, of course, the world of nature" and it is for her vivid

¹⁴ "A Nocturnal Reverie." In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (pp. 105-106).

descriptions of nature and for Wordsworth's praise for her use of nature imagery that the critics take her as a great nature poet. However, Salvaggio further suggests that, her use of natural world is quite different from the contemporary male poets; though to a certain extent Finch makes use of the common subjects in poetry by retreating into shade, into the natural world, she "simply deviated from the subjects that normally preoccupied her contemporaries" (1998, pp. 246-247). The beautiful nature at night time is described in the poem and the recurrent theme in Finch's poetry, her concern in being a woman poet, is mingled with the beautiful nature descriptions. The scenery is peaceful, and the animals are enjoying the peace and glory of nature just like the poet who is awake "whilst tyrant *man* does sleep" (38). The scenery described is far away from the daily concerns of man, and for a short period of time, during the time that everyone sleeps, it is a nature that belongs only to woman. The poem opens with the description of the very night that the poet enjoys the beautiful scenery all by herself:

In perfect charms, and perfect virtue bright:
When odors, which declined repelling day,
Through temperate air uninterrupted stray;
When darkened groves their softest shadows wear,
And falling waters we distinctly hear;
When through the gloom more venerable shows
Some ancient fabric, awful in repose,
While sunburnt hills their swarthy looks conceal,
And swelling haycocks thicken up the vale. . . . (20-28)

Doody states that the poem is not just a masterpiece of nature poetry "but of quiet protest – male civilization's brutal ownership of both woman and nature" (2000, p. 222). While the "tyrant man" sleeps and "no fierce light" (40) disturbs her peace she wants to feel the joy – the joy of the world that is far from daylight and its restrictions. A woman can only participate in its joy when everyone sleeps and she is alone. Despite the darkness, she offers a highly descriptive and detailed picture of what she sees. She wishes to enjoy this moment until it is all ruined with the coming of day, because with the daylight the world, that for the moment in darkness belongs only to her, would belong to man:

In such a *night* let me abroad remain,
Till morning breaks, and all's confused again;
Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed,
Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued. (47-50)

Mermin praises the high poetic quality of “A Nocturnal Reverie” stating that it is “a splendid evocation in rhymed iambic pentameter of the mysteries of darkness,” and she further argues:

The fact that the poem’s fifty lines are all one sentence, the grammatical suspension and development mimicking the long suspended interval until morning breaks the spell, shows a virtuoso’s skill; but shows it so modestly that most readers don’t see it at all. (1990, p. 349)

The world celebrated in the poem is a world of darkness, a world of shade but still in the dim light and through the imagination of the woman poet, is a beautiful piece of nature. To live in such a world and enjoy its beauty – but only in darkness – to insist in writing poetry despite the restrictions of the poetic tradition and with a thorn placed on the breast is not an easy task for the woman poet, however determined she could be. Such determination and struggle brings along not only good poetry but also melancholy, which at times could wipe away the poetic skill and creativity. The pain of melancholy is presented in “The Spleen, A *Pindaric Poem*.”¹⁵ However, this melancholy does not provide the woman poet with inspiration or poetic creativity, as in the case of the Renaissance sonneteers who followed the Petrarchan tradition and who turned their plight of unreturned love and frustrated passion into beautiful verses. The spleen that Finch suffers from is quite different from the melancholy that paves the way to poetic creativity; it is destructive and is resembled to Proteus who with continuous shape-shifting affects people. She suffers from it, but she suffers more because her poetry is much affected with the consequences of the spleen:

O’er me, alas! thou dost too much prevail:
I feel thy force, whilst I against thee rail;
I feel my verse decay, and my cramped numbers fail.
Through thy black jaundice I all objects see,
As dark, and terrible as thee,
My lines decried, and my employment thought
An useless folly, or presumptuous fault. . . . (74-80)

Women are believed to suffer from it commonly, and to keep themselves away from spleen, the ladies are supposed to deal with embroidery, stuff birds or paint on glass (85-87). Salvaggio thinks that the poem “shows not only the personal cost to the woman who writes, but the cost of writing ‘as a woman’ during an age that often figured woman in terms of disease” (1998, p. 260). Every insignificant thing that a woman experiences is

¹⁵ “The Spleen.” In Rogers and McCarthy (Eds.) (pp. 100-104).

related to the cause of the disease, even a “sullen *husband’s* feigned excuse” (91) could cause spleen. However, it is not only the traditional idea that associates this sickness with women but it is also some women who contributed to this idea in pretending to suffer from spleen for the sake of a melancholic look which would surely attract attention:

When the coquet, whom every fool admires,
Would in variety be fair,
And, changing hastily the scene
From light, impertinent, and vain,
Assumes a soft, a melancholy air. . . . (99-103)

However, unlike in the fashion, Finch marks her difference from other women as she has done in “The Appology.” For Gilbert and Gubar the poem is an honest “self-examination” of Finch where she reveals “how severely she herself has been influenced by the kinds of misogynistic strictures” about women’s emotional states. Wondering whether it is “crazy, neurotic, splenetic, to want to be a writer,” Gilbert and Gubar further argue that, the seventeenth and eighteenth century women writers and even some of the nineteenth century ones felt that – though they did not confess – writing is madness, and it is the reason why they make apologies about their writing, as it is evident in Finch’s “The Introduction” (1984, pp. 60-61).

Gilbert claims that “this modest poetess of “Spleen” and sorrow,” Anne Finch, “contending against a sense of her own contracted wing, pioneered a poetic mode for other women, a mode of reticence conquered by assertion and self-examination, a mode of self-definition *within* and *against* the context of prevailing male definitions of women” (1977, p. 449). Despite the fact that it is considered to be trivial, splenetic, unworthy in the eyes of people who despise women’s poetry, Anne Finch, in the poems studied, presents her determination and love for writing. When the world that she is living in fails to fulfill her yearnings as a woman poet, through imaginative wanderings in the groves of laurel, through her conversations with the classical figures related to poetry, through her attempts to find for herself a place in the shade and participating in the joy of nature during darkness – the only time that nature belongs to her – she attempts at creating a realm for herself as a poet, which is at times a pastoral landscape, or at times a land of classical figures, and at times a shady place so close to the world she lives in. There she raises her poetic voice primarily with the aim of questioning, criticizing and discussing the roles assigned to women, thus she reveals how difficult it is for a woman to step out of these dictated roles if she wants to write. Humorously and playfully, allegorically, ironically or apologetically, but in a determined manner, Anne Finch expresses her desire to be a poet in an age when women are not welcomed to the literary world – and she writes at the cost of being called an intruder.

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