Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

# TRANSGRESSING MALE BOUNDARIES: THE POETIC WORKS OF ANNE FINCH

Rabia KÖYLÜ

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2018

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Rabia Köylü tarafından hazırlanan "Transgressing Male Boundaries: The Poetic Works of Anne Finch" başlıklı bu çalışma, 08/06/2018 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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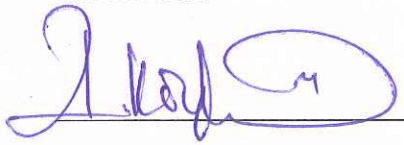

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o **Serbest Seçenek/Yazarın Seçimi**

06 /07/2018

***Rabia KÖYLÜ***

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# ÖZET

KÖYLÜ, Rabia. *Erkek Sınırlarını İhlal Etmek: Anne Finch'in Manzum Eserleri.* Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2018.

Winchilsea Kontesi Anne Finch, on yedinci yüzyıl sonları ve on sekizinci yüzyıl başları arasındaki dönemde yaşamış üretken bir yazardır. Pek çok konuda farklı edebi türlerde eserler vermiş olmasına rağmen, daha çok manzum eserleriyle ön plana çıkmaktadır. Manzum eserlerinde dönemin siyasi ve sosyal konularını sıklıkla ele alır fakat temel kaygısı kadının toplumdaki, özellikle de edebiyat geleneğindeki ikincil konumunu eleştirmektir. Toplumun ayrıcalıklı bir sınıfından gelmesine rağmen, sosyal sınıf farkı gözetmeksizin kadınların sorunlarını dile getirmiştir. Ayrıca şiirlerinde kadının toplumdaki ikincil konumuna yönelik eleştirileri, kadın şairin şiir geleneğindeki konumuna yönelik eleştirileriyle iç içedir. Finch ayrıca toplumsal cinsiyet yoluyla kadına biçilen ve özellikle onu sanatta ve toplumda ikincil konuma iten cinsiyet rollerini de eleştirmektedir. Dönemin diğer kadın şairleri şiirlerinde benzer konuları işlemiş olsa da, Finch'i özgün kılan onun bu eleştirileri yöneltme şekli ve şiir tekniğidir. Bu sebeple, bu çalışmanın temel amacı Finch'in şiir tekniğini ve biçemini bu konular çerçevesinde incelemek ve tartışmaktır. Finch manzum eserlerinde kadını sessiz kılan mitlerin kullanımını eleştirmektedir. Bu nedenle birinci bölümde Finch'in bu mitleri nasıl gözden geçirdiği ve düzelttiği ele alınmaktadır. Mitolojik karakterleri konu ettiği şiirlerinde Finch, kadını mecazi anlamda dar kalıplara hapseden mitleri yeniden yorumlamayı amaçlamaktadır. İkinci bölümde, Finch'in fabllarında uyguladığı eleştirel yaklaşım tartışılmaktadır. Yazar, La Fontaine fabllarındaki erkek karakterleri dişi olarak cinsiyetlendirerek fabllara kadın bakış açısı getirmektedir. Fabllarında güçlü kadın ve zayıf erkek karakterler ekleyerek toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına meydan okumaktadır. Ayrıca La Fontaine fabllarını döneminin sosyal ve siyasi olaylarına uyarlamakta ve böylelikle İngiliz fabl geleneğinin gelişimine de katkı sağlamaktadır.

Üçüncü bölümde Finch'in doğa unsurlarını mecazi olarak nasıl ele aldığı tartışılmaktadır. Doğa şiirlerinde Finch bu unsurlara yeni mecazi anlamlar yükleyerek kadın şairin şiir geleneği içerisindeki durumunu gözler önüne sermektedir. Pastoral şiirlerde görülen gölge imgesini kadın şairin hiçbir kısıtlama olmaksızın sesini yükseltebildiği dişil bir alan haline dönüştürmekte ve böylelikle kadın şairin şiirsel alanı

sorununa çözüm getirmektedir. Ayrıca kadın şair ve kuş figürü arasında bir ilişki kurmakta ve kadın şair için özgürlüğün önemini tartışmaktadır. Manzum eserlerinde, özellikle de doğa şiirlerinde, Finch kadının şiir geleneğinin dışında bırakılmasına içerlemez, daha ziyade memnun görünür çünkü o bu durumun kadın şairin geleneğin kısıtlayıcı kurallarına maruz kalmaksızın kendini özgürce ifade edebilmesini sağladığına inanır. Manzum eserlerin kapsamlı bir incelemesinden sonra, tüm kısıtlamalara rağmen Finch'in bir kadın şair olarak nasıl sesini yükselttiği ve mecazi anlamda şiir geleneğinde şimdiye kadar kadını sessiz kılan ve böylece dışlayan mitlere, edebi türlere ve geleneklere nasıl yeni bakış açıları getiren "davetsiz bir misafir" olduğu ortaya konulmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler**

Anne Finch, mitoloji, fabl, doğa imgeleri, toplumsal cinsiyet

## ABSTRACT

KÖYLÜ, Rabia. *Transgressing Male Boundaries: The Poetic Works of Anne Finch.* Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2018.

Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchilsea, is a prolific writer who lived in the period between late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Although she wrote about different subjects in various literary forms, she rather comes into prominence with her poetic works. She represents political and social issues of her time in her poetic works; however, her major concern is to criticise the secondary position of women in society, particularly in the literary tradition. Although she belonged to a privileged class of her society, in her poetic works, she reflects the problems of women in general regardless of their social classes. Besides, in her poems, Finch's criticisms of the secondary position of women in society and in marriage are interwoven with her criticisms of the position of the female poet in the poetic tradition. Finch also criticises the gender roles which are allotted to woman through gender stereotyping, particularly the roles that put her in a subordinate and secondary place in art and life. Although other female poets of the period dealt with similar issues in their poetry, Finch's authenticity lies in her poetics and the way she directs her criticism. The major concern of this study, therefore, is to analyse and discuss Finch's poetics and style within the frame of these issues. In her poetic works, Finch criticises the (use of) myths that silenced woman. Therefore, in the first chapter, Finch's strategies of revising and correcting the myths are discussed. In her poems about mythological characters, Finch aims at reinterpreting the myths that metaphorically imprison woman. In the second chapter Finch's critical strategies in her fables are discussed. Finch brings a female viewpoint to the fables by identifying the gender of the male characters in La Fontaine's fables as female. In her fables, she challenges stereotypical gender norms by representing strong female characters and weak male characters. Besides, she also adapts La Fontaine fables to current social and political events of her time, therefore, contributes to the development of the English fable tradition. In the third chapter, Finch's metaphorical employment of the nature elements is discussed. In her nature poems, Finch ascribes new metaphorical meanings to the elements of nature in order to present the plight of the female poet in the poetic tradition. She turns the pastoral shade into a feminine space where the female poet can

raise her voice without any restriction; therefore, she delivers a solution to the problem of female poet's secondary position in the poetic realm. She also builds analogy between the female poet and the bird figure and discusses the significance of freedom for the female poet. In her poetic works, particularly in her nature poems, Finch does not resent the female poet's exclusion from the poetic tradition, but rather appreciates it because she believes that it enables the female poet to express herself freely without restrictive conventions of the tradition. After an in depth analysis of her poetic works, it is concluded that despite all the restrictions, Finch manages to raise her voice as a female poet and metaphorically becomes an "intruder" in the poetic tradition providing new perspectives to the myths, literary genres and traditions that so far excluded or silenced woman.

**Key Words**

Anne Finch, fable, mythology, nature images, gender

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# INTRODUCTION

I hate these Petticoat-Authors; 'tis false
Grammar, there's no Feminine for the *Latin* word,
'tis entirely, of the Masculine Gender, and the
Language won't bear such a thing as a she-
Author.

--Gildon, *A Comparison*

. . . Therefore, this same world
Uncomprehended by you must remain
Uninfluenced by you.-- Women as you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us donating mothers, chaste wives.
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
We get no Christ from you, -- and verily
We shall not get a poet, in my mind.

--Browning, *Aurora Leigh*

Anne Kingsmill Finch (1661-1720), the Countess of Winchilsea, was a very prolific and influential female writer of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. She was one of the recognised and highly acclaimed poets of her time although her fame faded gradually in the following centuries. She produced plenty of literary works in different forms such as love songs, sacred songs, Pindaric odes, satires[i], fables, translations, and verse criticism. She wrote two tragedies: *Love and Innocence* and *Aristomenes: Or the Royal Shepherd*. According to her account of the first reading of *Aristomenes* to Lord Winchilsea in the Prologue and the setting of Godmeersham in the Epilogue, it is estimated to have been completed before September 1689, before the death of Charles, the second earl. *Love and Innocence*, on the other hand, is considered to have been written before *Aristomenes* as an experiment to see whether she could carry through such an attempt" (Reynolds xcvi). Nevertheless, no exact date of production can be given. Moreover, she never persisted in pursuing a career as a playwright and her two tragedies remained as experimental attempts. Finch's literary career is best known for her poetic works, particularly for her criticism of the secondary position of women in life and art, which will be the primary concern of this study.

She started writing in 1685 and continued until her death in 1720 as a "minor writer" (Reynolds xvii). The references to Finch as a "minor writer" is a common critical judgement as Finch preferred to circulate her works in manuscripts like many aristocratic ladies of the time. Her earliest manuscript collection, which is held at Northamptonshire Record office, dates back to 1690-91 (G. Wright 146-47). Other known two manuscript collections are folios. One is held at the Folger Shakespeare Library and dates back to c. 1691-1701 and the other one is the Wellesley manuscript (G. Wright 147). Being a collaboration of the Finches and publisher John Barber, *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions* (1713) is the only published major collection of her poetic works during her lifetime although she appeared anonymously in miscellanies earlier. Finch was acclaimed as an Augustan poet during her life time, later praised as a Pre-romantic due to her use of nature elements in a meditative mode. Her poems "The Spleen," "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat," and "A Nocturnal Reverie" were regarded as "of much superior merit" by prominent Romantic poet William Wordsworth (Wordsworth 228). She has lately become a focal point of literary attention as a female poet.

Her friends and admirers included such well-known writers of Augustan literature as Jonathan Swift (1677-1745) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744), both of whom encouraged her to write and publish. In his poem "Apollo Outwitted to the Honourable Mrs. Finch, under Her Name of Ardelia" (1711) Swift almost foreshadows Finch's literary career as a talented but later forgotten poet by making Ardelia steal the gift of song by Apollo and being punished with remaining unknown. Ardelia is the pen name and poetic self that Finch adopts for herself. Barash draws attention to the fact that in her early manuscript Finch "calls herself 'Areta', suggesting a female version of Ares, Roman god of war; Arethuse, a nymph in the train of chaste Diana, to whom Mary of Modena was often compared; as well as the Greek word for virtue" (248). She further explains the implications of the name Ardelia as follows: "Ardelia . . . is the female form of 'ardelio', Latin for a meddler or busybody" (*English Women's Poetry*[1] 284). It is also believed that Finch used this pen name after a figure in one of Philips's poem. It is significant that, as Erol observes, the female writers of the period tended to adopt names from classical literature and pastoral tradition in order to ascribe themselves new

[1] From this page onwards, the title of this work will be abbreviated as *EWP*.

roles and reiterate their new roles (53). In this sense, Swift's reference to Finch as "Ardelia," the poetic persona Finch adopts for herself indicates that he recognised her female poetic identity. Swift's attitude towards Finch's poetic aspirations was obviously moderate.

Alexander Pope remained as an ambivalent figure for the critics of Finch. In his poem "Impromptu, to the Countess of Winchilsea" he flatters Finch's talent while acknowledging the "impossibility of a community of women writers across time, on a necessary rivalry and mutual exclusivity of female achievement" (Campbell 106). Finch in her "The Answer" reminds him of the fate of Orpheus who was punished by the resentful heroines upon his leaving his wife in hell. Despite this seemingly strong literary friendship, it is commonly agreed that Pope's satirical farce *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717) which he co-authored with two other members of Scriblerus Club; John Gay (1685-1732) and John Arbuthnot (1667-1735) aims to ridicule female literary aspirations. Furthermore, it is assumed to be addressing Finch through the mocked character Phoebe Clinket who desires to get her plays before the public (Campbell 108, Reynolds lxiii, Parker qtd. in Sherburn 94). However, contrary to the popular judgement, Phoebe Clinket's keen endeavour to be known publicly does not match with Finch's more conservative attitude towards publishing her works, since Clinket is represented as a persisting and scrupulous character. In addition to this, when six months after the play was staged, Finch hosted Pope as her guest in Eastwell (Sherburn 95). Furthermore, when Pope's *Works* came out the same year with the play, seven commendatory poems were placed after the preface, the second of which was by Finch. Evidently, despite Pope's cynical attitude towards female literary aspiration as reflected in the second of his *Epistles to Several Persons* (1735), he recognised and praised Finch as a member of the literary society and became an encouraging friend of her.

Besides her literary friendship with Swift and Pope, Finch was a highly acclaimed poet of her time in general. She was eulogised by her male contemporaries, who contributed much to the progress of her fame. One of the earliest tributes to her work seems to be *An Ode on Love, inscribed to the Honourable Mrs. Finch* which is a four and a half pages long poem found "in a package of manuscript poems in the possession of the Duke of Marlborough," this was followed by praises of Will Shippen, a parliamentary

Jacobite and poet, upon Finch's appearance with "The Spleen" in Gildon's *Miscellany* in 1701[ii] (Reynolds li-lii). Later Mrs. Randolph "an obscure poet" complimented her as heir to "Orinda," the appreciated poet Katherine Philips (McGovern 121, Reynolds lii). She had acquaintance with Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) who approved her reluctance to publish (McGovern 100, Reynolds liii). Although they celebrated a certain type of female writer who was "refined, domestic, and adhering to the heteronormative expectations of a patriarchal culture" (Ingrassia 3), Finch's appearances in George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) and in George Colman and Bonell Thorton's *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755) contributed to the continuity of her fame which began to fall into oblivion in the second half of the eighteenth century. Similarly, in *The Feminiad* (1754) by John Duncombe she was celebrated as "a lady of great wit, and genius" (qtd. in Ingressia 3). The revival of her fame in the nineteenth century was with William Wordsworth's praise in his *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface* (1815). After the publication of *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1825) by Alexander Dyce, Wordsworth wrote a letter to Dyce in which he expressed his genuine sympathies for Finch's talent:

> I had only a glance at your work; but I will take this opportunity of saying, that should a second edition be called for, I should be pleased with the honour of being consulted by you about it. There is one poetess to whose writings I am especially partial, the Countess of Winchilsea. I have pursued her poems frequently, and should be happy to name such passages as I think most characteristic of her genius and most fit to be selected. (qtd. in Reynolds lxxvi)

Edmund Gosse (1849-1928) is another significant name who contributed to Finch's literary recognition, introducing her to a larger audience by securing her place in Ward's *English Poets* (1880) (Reynolds lxxxii). In 1903, with Myra Reynolds's publication of her verses with a long introduction of her life and poetic style, Finch's fame was perpetuated. In 1929, Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* took the subject from a feminist perspective and expressed her sympathies for Finch. With Katharine Rogers's edition of *Selected Poems* (1979), Ruth Salvaggio's chapter on Finch in *Enlightened Absence: Neo-classical Configurations of the Feminine* (1988), Barbara McGovern's publication of her critical biography in 1992, Charles Hinnant's analysis of her poetry in *The Poetry of Anne Finch: An Interpretive Essay* (1994), Carol Barash's chapter in

*English Women's Poetry 1649-1714* (1996) and, Jennifer Keith's articles in the late 90s, Finch's fame has been reinstated, as even greater than before.

From the 1970s onwards critics of Finch's poetic works have mostly focused on her poetic style with great emphasis on how her style contributed to her thematic concerns of gender issues. Finch has begun to be appreciated as a touchstone of the female literary tradition due to not only her reflections on gender issues, but also her power in creating her own poetics. According to Barash, Finch has always "maintained a place both in Augustan literature and in the canon of 'women's literature' that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century and has shaped ideals of women's writing ever since" (*EWP* 259). The main concern of Finch's writing is the secondary position of women in life and art; however, her writings are so preoccupied with public affairs that in some cases they become almost inseparable from one another. Therefore, an analysis of her writing career will require a biographical sketch of her life, as it was highly affected by the political upheavals of the time.

As the child of Sir William Kingsmill and Anne Haslewood, both of whom were from old and prominent families "noted for Royalist sympathies, pride in family heritage, commitment to hospitality and Orthodox Church of England loyalties" (McGovern 8), Finch's involvement with the political life had begun very early. Her father's family, the Kingsmills had been serving the royalty for four centuries (McGovern 9, Reynolds xviii-xix). According to Reynolds's detailed biographical introduction, in 1661, when she was five months old, her father William died leaving three children, William, Bridget and Anne and a widow with a will informing that the estates would be under his wife's control until William, two or three years old at the time, would grow up. He also bequeathed a sum of £2000 to be given to Bridget in her twenty-first birthday or on her marriage and £1500 to be put aside for Anne while emphasising the education of his children. In 1662, two years before her death, her mother Anne, remarried Sir Thomas Ogle, from this marriage was born Dorothy Ogle to whom Finch refers to as "Teresa" and expresses her deep affections for her in her poems. In 1664, however, the mother died leaving four children and all her possessions to her husband with the belief that he would be responsible for the education and the government of the children. (Reynolds xix-xx). However, Ogle was sued by the maternal uncle of the children, William

Haslewood, upon the claim that he had been "unlawfully using the profits and interests from the estates left" (McGovern 11). There is no other record of Thomas Ogle except his being Major of H. M. Holland Regiment in 1665 and his death in 1671 (Reynolds xx). Dorothy was left as the ward of Richard Campion (Reynolds xx). Bridget and Anne did not stay with their uncle and legal guardian William Haslewood, but with their grandmother in Charing Cross until her death in 1672 (McGovern 12-13). According to the accounts in a neighbour's diary, kept by a teenage Thomas Isham, the girls lived in Maidwell, Northampton from that date on (McGovern 15). However, the facts about Finch's educational life largely rely on the diary entries of Thomas Isham who had tutorials on classical literature. It is assumed that most probably, like many girls of upper classes of the time, Anne took advantage of these tutorials as families were in a close relationship (McGovern 15-19). Some letters in Hatton MSS in the British Museum also indicate that Anne and Bridget had a more extensive education than Dorothy (Reynolds xx).

In 1682, Anne Kingsmill became a maid of honour to Mary of Modena, wife of James II. Her stay in the court circle is highly significant in terms of her writing career. She became a Tory Royalist, keen supporter of the Stuart dynasty and an admirer of Mary of Modena. The court offered her chances to improve her artistic and intellectual sentiments in two ways: for one thing, the court of James II and the attitudes of Court Wits were quite supporting in terms of female literary production as "the morality of female subordination . . . was associated with middle-class Puritanism" (Rogers 54) and for the other, Mary of Modena herself was a keen lover of art and supporter of female artistic production (Barash, *EWP* 150, McGovern 21). Barash notes that:

> The Maids of Honour performed in court masques; they read, sang, and painted. Most important in terms of producing women writers, they were schooled both in French and Italian translations of classical texts and in the heroic tradition of Tasso and Ariosto, and they were urged to make their own English translations of these works. ("The Political Origins" 330)

Residing in the court, Anne Kingsmill met Colonel Heanage Finch, to whom she got married and led a happy married life. Her domestic happiness is frequently reflected in her love lyrics. Although Colonel Finch was just a commoner at the time, he was respected in court circles since he was the oldest living son of Lord Winchilsea and the

uncle of Charles, the current lord of Winchilsea at the time, therefore seemingly remote but still a probable heir to the title (Reynolds xxiv). McGovern maintains that he was "trained as a courtier and soldier and early appeared destined for a public career" (28). Under James II's government, he became much more involved in public affairs. He served as colonel in the army, deputy lieutenant for the country of Kent for three years and Member of Parliament for Hythe for a year (McGovern 28, Reynolds xxvii). After their marriage Finch resigned from her position in the court as maid of honour while her husband continued his career as a gentleman of bedchamber (McGovern 29). As the strict supporters of Stuart dynasty, The Glorious Revolution of 1688 was "a momentous and lamentable event" (Reynolds xxxviii) for the Finches. After the Revolution, Heanage Finch was arrested for treason when he attempted to meet James II in France, the case was later dismissed but he never accepted to take the vows of allegiance to the new monarchs of William and Mary (McGovern 57-8, Reynolds xxviii, Keith "The Poetics" 79).

Although political upheavals of the time affected Finch's life adversely, they also provided her materials to be used strategically. As stated above, gender and politics become highly interwoven concepts in Finch's writing. This is, according to Barash, due to the fact that like many of her female contemporaries; such as Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Katherine Philips (1632-1664) and Jane Barker (1652-1732), Anne Finch began her career as a political writer and these writers "develop[ed] distinct strategies of gender and poetic voice as they position[ed] their writing in relation to ongoing political conflict and literary change" (*EWP* 2). In this regard, "desecralization of the monarch's body" in writing urged the idea that "those who uphold the sacred body of monarchy in writing become legitimate political and linguistic subjects" (12-13). In this sense, some female writers tried to be linguistic subjects and gain literary authority by writing about the monarch. Therefore, Finch's sympathy for the exiled Stuarts was, to some extent, strategic, in a way, to legitimise her poetic identity as a female poet in the male-dominated poetic tradition.

In the same vein, it is observed that politics and the question of women's rights also merge into one another in this period. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, hence the accession of a protestant Whig monarch gave rise to questions concerning the position

of women. Toryism represented Royalism, a strong attachment to the old order of the court whereas Whiggism represented a more liberal form of government. Considering Finch's political conservatism in favour of Stuart monarchy, her proto-feminist ideals that are reflected in her writing might seem far-fetched. A historical paradox, which Gallagher calls "Tory feminism," emerged. Gallagher maintains that, "Toryism and feminism converge because the ideology of absolute monarch provides . . . an ideology of the absolute self" ("Embracing the Absolute" 135). On the other hand, Downie asserts that in contrast to the traditional hierarchical order of Toryism, "modernizing Whig views of society and the self could be seen as tending to atomize society, insisting increasingly on gender as radically constitutive of the self, and relying increasingly on commerce and contract to organize and connect a world of unique individuals" (125). In line with this, although Whiggish government is expected to bring largely positive outcomes in terms of individualism, democracy, religious tolerance and economy, such arguments are based on male political and property rights. Whiggish economic policy, which was highly dependent on the commercial activity, entailed certain disadvantageous aspects concerning the active participation of women in this sphere:

> First, the movement of power from landed gentry to bourgeoisie meant that women who could have held some power earlier, within the smaller rural sphere through local politics or landowning, lost even that. Secondly, the movement towards the urban sphere saw the formation of guilds and regulation of jobs that were traditionally held by women, such as nursing or midwifery. Regulation by men meant exclusion of women. Furthermore, when the economy had a rural base, women were able to participate from within the home, and assist their husbands in numerous ways. With the rise of an urban economy, jobs moved away from the home, and away from women. Thus general changes had never signified much advantage to women. (Barua 157)

Consequently, the emergence of the public sphere as a permanent feature of post-revolution English social life is considered a gender-based phenomenon. The existence of a public sphere necessarily entailed the emergence of a private sphere, which was allotted to women (Downie 68). To exemplify with a simple inquiry, the best-known institutions of the "bourgeois public sphere"[iii] which is associated with Whiggism, were the coffee houses. It was

> open to all corners (except for women); it was an urban and a commercial venue (hence it was 'bourgeois'); and, most importantly, it was a place in

> which rational debates on diverse matters, ranging from literary worth to high politics, could be carried out in a sober and rational way among equals. (Cowan 24)

Evidently, women were excluded from this kind of a public sphere for not being classified as "equals." O'Brien points to the existence of this very hypocrisy in the heart of Whiggish policy which promoted the idea of equality in theory but preached "passive obedience" in practice, particularly in the domestic realm. She further asserts, "[w]omen writers, in particular, made great play of the disparity between the Whigs' constitutional ideas of natural equality and conditional obedience in the political domain, and their expectation of total female obedience in the domestic realm" (22).

The expectation of women's obedience at home was quite confronting with the seemingly liberal and democratic approach in political life. It is not possible to suggest that Royalists were more concerned with women's active participation in public life. However, the change observed in the post-revolution English social life did not contribute to it but rather, justified the anxieties of these female writers. In this regard, Royalist aristocratic female writers of the time, who had been involved in public debates, had a kind of anxiety, reflected in their writing as Royalist sympathy rather than Whiggish antipathy. This anxiety had a great impact on Finch's writing to such an extent that her criticism of the position of women seems to be frequently legitimised by her Stuart sympathy.

Another negative effect of the Revolution for Finch was that they kept moving from one relative's or friend's home to another's as temporary refugees for a few years after the Revolution. (McGovern 57, Reynolds xxviii). Most significantly, they move to Eastwell upon an invitation would seem like an exile since she remained in the court circle. However, as Spencer also notes, life in Eastwell was quite encouraging for her writing with her husband's support:

> Her husband, his public career cut short, divided his time between antiquarianism and the service of her poetry. An octavo manuscript volume of her poems, apparently begun shortly before the move to Kent and continued there with Heneage Finch as amanuensis, was abandoned in favour of a more extensive, folio manuscript containing both plays and poems, which he began to compile around 1694/95." ("Sorrow into Song" 62)

Besides her husband's support, Charles, the son of Heanage Finch's older brother and the earl, was also quite supporting for Finch's poetic production. He "was not only knowing in all the rules of poetry, and at his pleasure capable of putting them in practice, [but] was also indulgent to the gentle craft of poesy when practiced by others" (Reynolds xxxv). Finch describes her affection for Eastwell and for the young earl as follows:

> But when I came to Eastwell, and cou'd fix my eyes only upon objects naturally inspiring soft and Poeticall imaginations, and found the Owner of itt, so indulgent to that Art, so knowing in all the rules of itt, and att his pleasure, so capable of putting them in practice; and also most obligingly favourable to some lines of mine, that had fall'n under his Lordship's perusal, I cou'd keep within the limmitts I had prescrib'd myself, nor be wisely reserv'd, in spite of inclination, and such powerfull temptations to the contrary. (qtd. in McGovern 71)

Consequently, this stay also contributed much to her pastoral style due to her close touch with nature, since she "had the leisure to take long walks in the lovely park of Eastwell and to wander about the countryside" (McGovern 78). This enabled her to scrutinise nature in depth, and to use nature elements in her poetic works by blending them with her ideas about the public affairs and gender issues. It was a time of retirement and artistic productivity for Finch. Even her pen name "Ardelia" is reminiscent of her mood, since it is a character found in one of Katherine Philips's poem, "A Retir'd Friendship: To Ardelia" who is "praising the joys of retirement" (McGovern 123). Eastwell and Charles's close relations with prominent literary figures of the time also consolidated her poetic creativity.

Political changes in the 1700s provided a more appropriate environment for the Finch family as James II's daughter Anne came to throne upon successive deaths of James II in 1701 and William III in 1702. The death of James II, as Barash notes, "pushed Finch toward more open—and explicitly more political—publication of her work" ("The Political Origins" 330). Her first poem to be printed outside of anthologies was "An Elegy on the Death of K[ing] James" ("The Political Origins" 330). In 1712 Heanage Finch became the Earl of Winchilsea upon the death of his nephew with no heir to the title. Unfortunately, Finches had to face financial hardships as well as taking up the prestige of the title (McGovern 99). In one of the memoirs in his *Journal to Stella* (1766), Swift expresses his sympathies for Finch, after her becoming the Countess of

Winchilsea, which brought her financial hardships in tow, as follows: “Poor Lord Winchilsea is dead, to my great grief. He was a worthy honest gentleman, and particular friend of mine: and, what is yet worse, my old acquaintance, Mrs. Finch, is now Countess of Winchilsea, the title being fallen to her husband, but without much estate” (454).

Finch published her *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions* only one year after she became Countess in 1712, which seems to justify Messenger’s argument, that “[a] countess had less to fear from a largely hostile public than a plain ‘Mrs.’” (28). For McGovern, another reason for this decision was Finch’s “new involvement in London literary society and, in particular, the influence and encouragement of some of the most prominent writers of the time” (100). However, her literary career as a professional, publishing writer was cut short when she died in 1720, six years before her husband. She left plenty of literary, most prominently poetic works that offer different layers of meanings with a very distinct poetic style to her readers. Most of the time her primary concerns in these works are the criticism of the secondary position of woman in life and literary tradition and the establishment of her own poetic identity as a female poet. As Williamson argues, almost “[n]o writer . . . wrote or thought more about being a she-author than did Winchilsea” (113). For a better understanding of her concerns about the position of women, it will be helpful to take a brief look at the situation of women in late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

During the period, English women lacked many privileges that men could easily attain such as formal education, active participation in political, economic, legal and social lives. Being born to an “overtly patriarchal society” (Eales 4), women were expected to be “chaste, silent and obedient” (Charlton 7). The stereotypical ideals of a virtuous woman were sustained both by religious doctrines and by the legal system. Considering the fact that to represent or idealise something in a particular way is actually a way of controlling it, the idealised female representations in the conduct books of the time reveal much about what it was supposed to be a woman. Although these books had a long history, with growing literacy and demand for printed books, they became much more popular from the sixteenth century onwards (Shoemaker 21). Conduct books actually aimed to instruct the readers regardless of their gender to act in a certain way,

appropriate to the social norms. However, they were also quite significant in terms of gender construction. To exemplify, in *Ladies Calling* (1673) by Richard Allestree, "a work which has become a byword for the patriarchal moralism" (Apetrei 1), the significance of virginity is emphasised as follows: "[those who preserve their virginity] . . . *may care for the things that are of the Lord, that she may be holy both in Body and in Spirit*" ("Of Virgins" 2). Most of the myths were grounded on the religious doctrines, emphasising the inferiority of woman to man. According to this, a woman's acceptance of the gender roles that are prescribed to her would enable her to become godly and determine her possibility of eternal relief. Similarly, among the "duties" of a wife to her husband, the most significant one to highlight the hierarchical relationship between the spouses was undoubtedly obedience:

> Another Duty to the person of Husband is Obedience, a word of a very harsh found in the ears of some Wives, but is certainly the duty of all: and that not only by their promise of it, tho that were sufficient; but from an Original of much older date, it being the mulct that was laid upon the first Womans disobedience to God, that she (and all derived from her) *should be subject to the Husband;* so that the contending for superiority is an attempt to reverse the Fundamental Law, which is almost as ancient as the world. (Italics mine, "Of Wives" 191)

Even the legal existence of a woman was defined by her marital status. A woman should have a guardian, a father or most preferably a husband. Between fourteen and eighteen were the preferable marriageable ages for women's marriage. Anne Finch who got married at the age of twenty two was referred to in her marriage license as "a spinster aged ab 18 years" while Heneage Finch is referred to as "Batchelor" at the age of twenty seven (Reynolds xxv). A common prayer designed for wives was as follows:

> Give me grace, I most entirely beseech thee, to walk worthy of my vocation, to knowledge my husband to be my head, to learn thy blessed word of him, to reverence him, to obey him, to please him, to be ruled by him, peaceably and quietly to live with him. (qtd. in Charlton 7)

Man was considered the head of religious household (Willen 23) and the head of domestic state as households were regarded as the microcosms of the state (Stretton 43, Eales 4). Therefore, the husband had to have ultimate power and control over the servants, his children and his wife. For instance, when a man killed his wife, he was charged with murder and would be hung while a wife killing her husband was guilty of

"petty treason, a crime against the state, and might be burned at a stake" (Stretton 43). In marriage, the wife was the disadvantaged party in many senses. For instance, based on the Biblical doctrine that dictates a husband and a wife are one flesh, the common law identified them as one person and they had one legal personality which belonged to the husband. A married woman was a "feme covert," under the law of coverture which meant her legal identity was covered by her husband's; she could not make contracts, sue or be sued, write a will or control property (Hobby 66, Erickson 24, Stretton 42).

As they could not control their properties before marriage, some women, despite the risk, preferred to transfer their properties to third parties "feoffee to uses" or "trustees" so that they could have control on or benefit from them (Stretton 50). Divorce was not an option for English women until the Divorce Act in 1857; however, church courts would grant wives with a separation "a mensa et horo" (from "bed and board") to protect them from extreme violence performed by their husbands (Stretton 43). Extreme cruelty and adultery could be the only reasons for such a separation, which was quite rare and did not allow remarriage (Crawford and Gowing 164). However, widows "feme sole" had a distinct legal identity and could perform legal actions (Todd 25-26, Stretton 46). Widows had an ambiguous status in the society, as Todd maintains, "an ungoverned woman was a threat to the social order;" on the other hand, the remarrying widow was also a subject of criticism (26). For inheritance, if there was no will concerning the distribution of land, when the father died, his inheritance would pass to the eldest son under the common law doctrine of primogeniture (Erickson 26). Widowhood enabled women only to get one third of their husbands' property; however, they were still dependent on their wills before death (Stretton 47, Erickson 3).

Women were not able to receive formal education. Considering the fact that the majority of women were illiterate, their education was mostly through oral provision in church and family (Charlton 4). However, there was a growth in female literacy towards the end of the century; ten per cent of the women could sign their names in 1640s, the rate increased to twenty-five per cent in 1714 and to forty per cent in the 1750s (Towsey 21). On the other hand, the literacy rate of women in the period is a complex variable to determine since some could read but not write. As Mendelson asserts, "it was a widespread practice to teach girls to read but not to write" (137). One way of educating

girls was to send them to the household of another which was an old chivalric tradition (Charlton 9).

The early seventeenth century witnessed the establishment of boarding schools for the daughters of prominent families, where girls were taught needlework, household skills, reading, writing, dancing, and even some French and Latin which were the "accomplishments" considered suitable for good ladies (Lawson and Silver 116). Besides this sort of a "vocational" education, any kind of academic education that they could acquire was possible by attending their brothers' lessons or being allowed to go into their fathers' libraries, if they were exclusive enough (Stevenson 49). During the seventeenth century, "academies for the daughters of gentlemen" emerged. Among them the most notable one was Mrs. Salmon's school in Hackney which Katherine Philips attended and in the late seventeenth century elementary schools for the children of the poor were opened (Charlton 9-10). However, women were not allowed to attend universities. Therefore, any kind of education they could receive, if they would, had to remain on the mediocre level. Daughters of the gentry and prosperous families were advantaged to some extent as they could be taught by the resident or visiting tutors according to the expectations of their families (Lawson and Silver 115). However, this sense of education was limited to the family's notion of education which was shaped by their expectations or their norms determining what was suitable for a lady.

In terms of occupations for women, first of all, all women were expected to be occupied with childbearing and housewifery regardless of their positions in the socio-economic hierarchy (Mendelson 59). However, housewifery was an unpaid occupation, a maidservant would earn wage for the labour performed by housewives as 'duties.' Prior draws attention to the degradation of women's domestic labour in housewifery as follows: "[w]hatever a man did. . . was a work, and what a woman did was her duty" (54). Family industry was considered the most suitable occupation for women after housewifery, especially for the wives of craftsmen. These industries included brewing, baking, spinning, and butter and cheese making and similar ones (Clark 9); but, as Clark further argues, the rise of mercantilism and ultimately capitalism entailed a separation of workshop and home which meant women's disassociation from such economic

activities (1-13). Most of the time working lives of and the occupations for women were as follows:

> [t]he only 'career' open to most women was marriage. A middle-class or upper-class woman from seventeenth century to twentieth century who was left for some reason unsupported had enormous difficulty until very recently in earning a living, unless she happened to be the bourgeois widow of a tradesman or craftsman who could take over her husband's business. The choices for most women who could not be absorbed into a family as an extra pair of hands, were teaching children, as a governess or in a school, or needlework of some kind, which was so poorly paid as to be virtually a slow route to starvation, and prostitution. No professions of any kind were open to women. (Stevenson 34-5)

Stevenson's argument is most valid for the women of middle and upper classes. As Mendelson suggests, considering the fact that the majority of the female population was poor, the working life of a poor girl began very early as an apprentice in lace-making, spinning or knitting, usually in labour-intensive, low-paid jobs. Women used to earn lower wages than their male counterparts for the same work, mostly one half or two thirds of what they earned. Being maid servant was another occupation for young unmarried poor women, which was risky at the same time for they would be subjected to mistreatment or rape. Some who could attain a cow or a piece of land were lucky that they could sell the products that they could obtain from these belongings (60-63).

Literature was another possible occupation for women. Although they were excluded from formal education, which was a requirement for professions such as law, women of gentry could make use of liberal education and pursue a literary career. There was a growth in women's publication from the mid-seventeenth century onwards (Mendelson 73). From this period on, it became both easy and difficult for women to live by pen or produce art. A growing public demand for fiction and the improved technology which made printing cheaper and simpler enabled more women to have a writing career (Stevenson 35). It was a transitional period from 1660 to 1780 when manuscript circulation gave its place to literature dominated by publication, from which many women benefited (Prescott 55). Publication provided women with such opportunities as earning money, self-actualisation, experimenting with literary forms and expressing their views on public debates which were more difficult earlier (Ingrassia 8).

On the other hand, writing women risked their reputation and were blamed for being unchaste, a disgrace for whole family (Crawford 162). As Gallagher puts it, it was believed that "[t]he woman who shared the contents of her mind instead of reserving them for one man was literally, not metaphorically, trading her sexual property. If she was married, she was selling what did not belong to her, because in *mind and body* she should have given herself to her husband" (*Nobody's* 23). A publishing woman meant a "public woman," who was equated with a prostitute (Gallagher, *Nobody's* 23). For this reason, aristocratic ladies of the time, including Anne Finch, preferred to circulate their works in manuscripts in order to avoid the risk of being stigmatised as "public woman." However, it has to be noted that manuscript circulation was not just a medium of necessity. Despite the risk of remaining undiscovered, manuscript writing enabled female writers to assert themselves as established poets. For elite writers, especially for poets, it was also a class-conscious "prestige medium," because "scribal transmission kept one's compositions out of the sullying hands of lesser creatures" (King 130) and would enable them to speak to "a small audience of like-minded persons" (Stevenson 35).

Nonetheless, the Augustan literary tradition did not allow many writers regardless of their gender to present themselves unless they had a deep classical learning and sophisticated literary taste. In this sense, most women were culturally disadvantaged. Although they experimented with various literary forms and wrote about a variety of subjects, they were excluded from the literary world due to their lack of formal education. Most of them did not know Latin, "the language of professional and theological discourses" (Crawford 161). In this sense, even learning a foreign language was a gender-based skill, as French was considered more suitable for women, while Latin was essential for a learned male writer.

On the other hand, writing for the stage was profitable and risky, because "[i]n a century which defined women's greatest virtue as a chaste and modest silence, most women playwrights were pilloried by their male competitors" (Stevenson 54). Moreover, certain genres such as diaries, journals, private letters, fiction and stories were considered more suitable for "modest femininity" (Spencer, "Publick View" 95). Significantly, novel was coded as a feminine literary form, associated with popular

culture. It was considered more of a domestic form, "which could not only be written at home, but which could also confine itself imaginatively to a feminine sphere and still find a market" (Stevenson 54). Stevenson further asserts that writing out of necessity or out of aspiration were the determining factors in placing a female writer in the literary tradition. Many minor writers of the time made much money by publishing romance-like novels with similar subject matters while justifying their writing as out of necessity. They were not considered professionals regardless of the literary forms they used. Those who were able to "afford to ignore profit motive" were more likely to be regarded as professionals than those who published for gain (Prescott and Shuttleton 9).

Poetic tradition, on the other hand, remained as an elite, male-dominated sphere. Women novelists, Spencer notes, "did not have to deal as women poets did with the sense of their difficult relation to a prestigious masculine tradition" ("Publick View" 106). According to Rogers there were two main reasons for why poetry was largely a masculine tradition:

> For one thing, the poet saw himself as a public figure – celebrating national events, reprehending the vices of society, relating personal experience to universal moral principles. And women were confined, by their opportunities and experience and what was assumed to be their capacity, to private social life and domestic sphere: they were not, supposedly, qualified to pronounce on the Use of Riches or the Reign of Dullness. For another, the poet was following in the footsteps of the Roman poets, who wrote from the conspicuously male point of view. (226)

Rogers exemplifies this with the case of love lyric. For Roman erotic poets, love for a woman was a superficial desire; women existed in this tradition only as "more or less unworthy love objects, existing for the amusement of men" (226). Following their footsteps, Restoration and early eighteenth-century poets employed the theme of love as an amusement and women appeared as sex objects. It was not considered appropriate for a woman to write for a man except for her husband whereas such male writers as John Wilmot and Matthew Prior could express their passions for their mistresses. For instance, no woman poet could express passion such overtly as Matthew Prior does in his poem "To Cloe" for his mistress Anne Durham: "Whilst I am scorch'd with hot desire, / In vain cold Friendship you return, /Your drops of pity on my fire, / Alas! but make it fiercer burn" (1-4). As H. B. Wright argues, however, not all the references to

Cloe could be identified with Anne Durham. Lisetta, who stands for Mrs. Elizabeth Cox, is another woman in Prior's poems. In his "The Question to Lisetta," Prior praises Cloe and asks Lisetta whom he should love, while Cloe listens when he plays and shares his sorrows (3-8). Considering the fact that the poem is addressed to Lisetta, this is a rhetorical question. In "Lisetta's Reply" it turns out that the poet now loves Lisetta: ". . . the world may see/Whom Chloe loves, and who loves me" (14-15). As can be inferred, women in Prior's love poems existed only as objects of inspiration which helped him express love. In John Wilmot's "To His Mistress" the male persona reproaches his beloved as follows: "Thou art my way; I wander if thou fly. / Thou art my light; if hid, how blind am I! / Thou art my life; if thou withdraw'st, I die." (13-15). Such overt expression of the passion was not a possibility for the female poets. In this vein, the tradition was restrictive for women; they would neither treat love as an amusement nor would write to their husbands as their male contemporaries did to their mistresses because the marriages were mostly arranged; therefore, not provide much inspiration (Rogers 226-227).

In a similar vein, Augustan literary tradition did not embrace the female writers in terms of form and diction either. For instance; satire, the most dominant literary form of the tradition, seemed unfeminine in attitude. The distinction between "feminine" and "unfeminine" forms roughly depends on its possibility of the public appearance and the required skills for the chosen form in the poetic tradition. For instance, playwrights risked their reputation more than the poets circulating manuscripts because it was more likely to be publicly known. On the other hand, poets who published their works were more prone to public ridicule because poetry required certain literary skills, believed to be attained through formal education from which women were excluded. Besides, as the poems are more likely to reflect the inner feelings of the poet, female poets had to be more cautious about what their writings would possibly mean. As satire was a more public and aggressive form with its critical purpose, it was considered "unfeminine." For the fear of being attacked or ridiculed by their male contemporaries, many preferred to stay away from such popular "masculine" forms as satire. On the other hand, the iambic pentameter used in heroic couplets sounded masculine to women (Doody *The Daring Muse* 242). As Doody further argues, "[t]he heroic measure was associated with matter thought foreign to women—classical learning, rule over the world" (242).

However, these did not pose obstacle for the female poets. They tended to prefer iambic tetrameter and seemingly "small and ordinary themes" (Mermin 336).

Another discouraging factor most female writers faced was that they would be blamed for plagiarism. One of the most well-known playwrights of the period, Susannah Centlivre, who was regarded as "the celebrated Mrs. Centlivre" (Wood 268) and praised as a woman of honour, was attacked as a plagiarist by her male contemporaries (Rosenthal 218). Similarly, in her "Upon the saying that my Verses were made by Another" (1686) Anne Killigrew (1660-1685) draws attention to how hard it is to claim a work of her own: "Th'Envious Age, only to me Alone / Will not allow, what I do write, my Own" (57-58). Besides, much of women's publication was reascribed to male authors (Crawford 158). In this sense, being a woman of literature was, in Finch's words, being an "intruder on the rights of men" ("The Introduction" 10). There were, however, many female writers who pursued literary careers and published despite, and sometimes as a reaction to, their secondary position in life and art. Many of these writers later found themselves a place in the literary canon with individual recoveries from the twentieth century onwards. Some of these female writers are going to be mentioned, with a particular emphasis on to what extent Anne Finch was influenced by them.

Finch was highly influenced by her predecessors in terms of subject matter, form and style. Among them, probably the most frequently cited and praised poetess is Katherine Phillips (1631-1664), known as "The Matchless Orinda." Her reputation, according to Barash, revolved around her virtuous and chaste poetic persona, which was appreciated by Dryden and other acknowledged male contemporaries of her at the time ( *EWP* 59). She preferred to circulate her works in manuscripts until her poems appeared in a pirated edition in 1664 without her consent, shortly before her death, for which she used "the metaphor of rape" in a letter published in the 1667 edition of her poems (Barash, *EWP* 55). Aphra Behn (1640-1689) was another notable writer of her time and was "the first English woman to make her living by literature" (Mermin 335). She was a prolific writer with her plays, prose tales, poems and translations. According to Virginia Woolf, "[a]ll women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who

earned them the right to speak their minds" (72). However, she was a notorious writer to such an extent that "potential women writers after Behn had to prove that they were not like her, but on the contrary modest, chaste, properly feminine" (Spencer, "Publick View" 94). Her plays were attacked as bawdy although it was regarded as a common characteristic of the Restoration stage that Jeremy Collier (1650-1726) harshly criticised[iv]. Significantly, Finch is generally placed within a female literary tradition constituted by Royalist female writers. According to Barash, Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Aphra Behn, Katherine Philips, Anne Finch and Jane Barker (1652-1732) modelled their careers on French "précieuses," later called "femme forte," or heroic woman, "who [was] translated to England as a figure for the woman writer—represent[ing] two opposing possibilities: ideal innocence, on the one hand, and an almost truculent political authority . . . on the other" (*EWP* 5-35). It was innocent, because they were writing for their sacred king; on the other hand, this enabled them to claim themselves as political authorities. Political edges of their works enabled these writers to legitimise their writing, for "the heroic tradition offered an ideal in which women's virtuous public acts triumphed over the limitations imposed by gender" (*EWP* 262). It was paradoxically restrictive for them because what enabled them to write publicly also determined their subject matter. A similar attitude is observable in the religious poems of these writers. Although religion played a very significant role in gender construction, it also provided them legitimacy and authority to speak publicly (Willen 24). In this vein, the religious writing of the female writers in this period was also strategic. It helped them assert their poetic authority and achieve artistic freedom. For instance, in her religious poems Finch tends to express her own world-view in the guise of piety.

In terms of content, the recurrent theme of female friendship and love, which is also observed in Finch's poetry, is seen in most of Cavendish's plays, but, Finch models her mythic female community on Philips's metonymic female friendship that she used during Interregnum for her Royalist sympathies (Barash, *EWP* 261). Besides, Philips and Behn also taught Finch that "the pastoral tradition could be moulded to the needs of a woman writer and that love was a fit topic for a female poet" (McGovern 127). Behn and Philips were also critical in their writing about the attitude towards women in society. Their use of female friendship and pastoral inspired Finch as they offered her "a

means by which she might modify some of the more patriarchal elements inherent in pastoral poetic conventions, particularly by introducing the theme of female friendship" (McGovern 123).

According to Mermin, among other women writers of the period, Aphra Behn, Katharine Phillips and Anne Finch are of great significance since "[t]hey flourished in literary contexts that gave openings to a female voice" despite "the cultural suppression of female voices" (335). Therefore, Finch's name is generally mentioned with these two prominent models. In her "The Miser and the Poet," though, Finch places herself within the tradition that included Matthew Prior (1664-1721), John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) and John Philips (55-64). This is most likely because, Finch "relies on both Philips and Behn as female precursors, but understands in the early eighteenth century the very different meanings of Philips and Behn" (Barash, *EWP* 9). Although these two models are generally named in the same literary tradition, they refer to distinct styles and stereotypes. Williamson distinguishes these two models as follows:

> Orinda and her progeny were socially as well as politically conservative, and therefore they tended to accept the sexual roles of the dominant ideology, wishing not to destroy institutions but to reform women's place in marriage and her educational opportunities. They hoped for attitudinal changes within individuals in coping with the status quo, rather than a changed social structure. They sought not sexual freedom but more nearly equal intellectual and moral status with men . . . . Aphra Behn and her colleagues, on the other hand, contributed to the changing modes of thought created by philosophical scepticism . . . . Changes in poetry, plays and fiction written by Behn and her followers demonstrate that their work did not simply reflect the ideologies . . . . but helped create them. (134-35)

Besides these distinguishing features of these two models, the attitudes towards them were also indicative of a female writer's choice. As mentioned above, Behn was a notorious writer while Philips was praised. Therefore, by placing herself in the tradition of Prior, Vanbrugh, Rowe and John Philips, Finch rejects to be mentioned with the models of Behn and Philips. However, Finch's rejection is not because she despised their talent but because she was against the stereotypical representations of female writers.

The use of mythological stories that is observed in Finch was initiated by Anne Killigrew (1660-1685), another influential writer and Finch's close friend from her service as maid of honour. Killigrew did not conceal her identity as the writer of her works, most probably because she came from a family of writers and courtiers, and because Mary of Modena herself was quite encouraging for her maids in terms of producing artistic works. Her use of pastoral resembles Finch's in the sense that pastoral setting becomes "where women's political community is voiced through the poet-speaker" (Barash, *EWP* 171). Like Finch, she also complained about the secondary position of women in the artistic sphere. However, it is commonly accepted that the most influential writer in Finch's life was, Mary Astell (1666-1731), "the first English feminist" (Goldie 65) in terms of her choice of subject matter. In her various works such as *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1703) and *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1697) she advocates the idea that women are as reasonable as men so they should acquire the same rights as men. Astell underlines the significance of women's education and Finch also draws attention to this issue in her "The Introduction" as follows:

> How are we fal'n, fal'n by mistaken rules?
> And education's, more then Nature's fools,
> Debarr'd from all improve-ments of the mind,
> And to be dull, expected and dessign'd; (51-54)

Besides being influenced by her contemporaries and predecessors, Finch also developed a very distinct poetic style that attracts the attention of many critics. Most of the time Finch's poetry is analysed in relation to the poetics of displacement. According to Katharine Rogers, she is "a woman imprisoned in man-made conventions" (236). From this perspective, Finch seems to be a writer who tries to accommodate herself in the poetic tradition. In fact, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, she is a female poet "who struggles to escape the male designs in which she feels herself enmeshed" (17). In line with this, Finch does not merely complain about this position and feel debauched. She rather "dismantle[s] the master's house with master's tools." [v] Finch does not demand but claim a place for herself in the literary tradition. Even in her most modest poetic works, the impression of self-doubt about the inadequacy of her lines is strategic. Her apologia is double-edged that she "used to establish both authority and seemly

humility" (Mallinson 35). As Hinnant notes, many late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century male poets believed that poetry had to be published with apology. Therefore, the apologetic tone in some of Finch's works may stand "as a reexamination of the Augustan tendency to employ self-depreciation exclusively as a mode of self-exculpation" (100). Similarly, McGovern asserts that:

> Her [Finch's] protestations against her own poetic abilities provide protection against possible charges that she has usurped the authority / power traditionally reserved for male poets. Through the strategy of equivocation she creates an ambiguous space between her self-effacting stance and her well-wrought poems, and it is precisely this space that provides her with artistic freedom. (42)

In his regard, by apologising, Finch both claims her place in the literary tradition and creates herself a space to achieve artistic freedom. However, it is difficult to place Finch in a specific literary tradition. She has the characteristics of Augustan tradition such as "distrust for the mob and a sophisticated acceptance of human weaknesses coupled with suspicion of human grandiosity" (Rogers 226). She uses Augustan diction and forms fluently, writing satirical works, fables, using pastoral and sometimes heroic couplets. However, rather than the poetics of displacement, hers is what Keith calls, "the poetics of replacement" ("The Poetics" 465), which refers to her rejection of the power to represent, as seen in her "transformation of the tropological tradition in which the poet is gendered as masculine and his object gendered as feminine" (467). In this sense, her use of Augustan diction and forms is, to some extent, subversive.

Therefore, this study aims to analyse and discuss Finch's thematic concern of gender issues with a particular emphasis on her use of certain conventions in order to challenge the secondary position of women in life and art. Although Woolf once asserted that ". . . one has only to open her [Finch's] poetry to find her bursting out in indignation against the position of women" (64), as will be traced in the following chapters, she does not merely rebel against the myths that put women in a subordinate position and silence them, but rather develops certain strategies in order to challenge them. In the first chapter, her use of mythological stories and elements is going to be discussed in regard to her revisionist and correcting attempts in the myths. The second chapter will deal with Finch's fables, how she adopts the genre and brings a female point of view to it as well as contributing to the development of the English fable tradition. In the third

chapter, her metaphorical use of nature images is going to be discussed in regard to her concern about the position of the female poet in the tradition. It will also be illustrated how Finch diverges from the male literary tradition and becomes a pioneering figure of female literary tradition as well as contributing to both traditions.

# CHAPTER I

## SUCH AN INTRUDER IN THE WORLD OF MYTHS: THE MYTHOLOGICAL POEMS

> Women have had the power of naming stolen from us...To exist humanly is to name the self, the world and God...Words which, materially speaking, are identical with the old become new in a semantic context that arises from qualitatively new experience.
>
> -- Daly, *Beyond God the Father*.

> It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments.
>
> --Boas, *Traditions*

In her poetic works, Finch usually criticises the secondary position of women in life and art. Her subject matter was not new at the time. However, she uses the current modes of her time for re-visioning and correcting this position. Finch does not solely criticise the secondary position allotted to women in society and the literary tradition, she challenges the myths that put women in that position. One of the strategies that Finch develops in her poetic works is to employ mythological elements and stories. For a late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century male writer, employing mythological stories was an indicator of classical learning, which was considered essential for a respected writer. As for the female writers, mythology enabled them, to use Greer's phrase, "to make inroads on the male preserve" (11). For Finch, the use of myths was advantageous in many senses. It enabled her to accommodate herself in the dominant literary tradition much easier, as it was an indicator of her deep learning and literary taste. As a female poet, preoccupied with the struggles of female poetic authority and the secondary position of women in her society, the use of mythological elements enabled Finch to revise the existing gender myths and to correct them. In this regard, the myths in her poems "no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy" (Ostriker 73). She replaces the representations of male imagination with her own representations in order to challenge the well accepted gender myths. Therefore, in this chapter, the mythological poems of Finch are going to be analysed and discussed with a

particular emphasis on her revisionist strategies. Although mythological elements abound in Finch's poetic works, in order not to digress, only the poems that are intended to challenge the existing myths and to revise them are going to be discussed.

In his *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) Harold Bloom adapts the Freudian paradigm of family romance to the historical relationship between modern artists and their predecessors. For Bloom, the primary struggle of literary history is the "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads" (26). The relationship between predecessor and successor poets is resembled to the relationship between fathers and sons. Successors are assumed to have had "the anxiety of influence," therefore they have felt the necessity of outcompeting their literary fathers. He further interprets the relationship between the poet and his muse as a sexual intercourse in which the poet does not rely on and love the muse at all as she "whored with many before him" (61). Although Bloom's study has been objected to by feminist critics, this exclusively male-dominated analysis of literary history is actually a glimpse of patriarchal poetics that has long operated. Evidently, literary mothers and daughters are excluded from this historical analysis of literature, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning once wrote in a letter to Mr Chorley in 1845 "I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none" (232). Consequently, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, while the literary sons were preoccupied with overcoming what Bloom calls, "the anxiety of influence," the literary daughters were concerned with "the anxiety of authorship" since they had to first define their own authorities as writers (49).

An analysis of literary tradition like Bloom's does not present the lack of female voices but rather indicates the suppression of them. Confined by their experiences and being reduced to stereotypes, women were left little space to claim authority in literary texts. Concerning the period during which Finch wrote, the controversy of the position of the female writer was double-edged. On the social level, as explained in the introductory part of this study, women lacked many privileges that men could attain, most significantly the formal education which was considered a key element for a respected writer in the literary tradition. In addition to this, a female writer mostly became a focal point of public ridicule and was even stigmatised for being unchaste. For this reason, most female writers either asserted that it was their creative masculine side which

enabled them to write or justified their writing as something they had to do out of necessity. On the cultural level, the female writer had to define her authority as a writer; therefore, she had to assert herself as a creative agency. However, it was a difficult task to conciliate the act of writing with femininity since the creative artistic ability had long been associated with masculinity. It was believed that, as Greer notes with an ironic adaptation of a phrase by Robert Graves, "[i]f man does and woman is, then she who does is man" (4). Graves's ironic statement draws attention to the patriarchal stereotyping of men and women in relation to a literary text. Women were excluded from being the makers of a text and when they tried to be so, they had to "de-sex" (Greer 18) themselves. As for poetry, the situation of women was even more problematic. Women could exist in the texts of male writers either as muses or sources of inspiration and even as mistresses. However, all these figures were silenced and did not have the freedom of expression, in male literary imagination. Therefore, the self-definition of the female poet required to challenge such representations. In this sense, before analysing the arguments that female poets including Finch developed, it will be helpful to clarify the stereotypical representations of women as muses and silent objects with a particular emphasis on how these representations excluded women from the position of makers.

Originated by Ancient Greeks, the principal role of muses was to help the poet remember the past events and sing. For them, muses "are not simply a passive catalyst behind the poet's creative act. The author is the compliant recipient and the Muses fill him with their creativity, their ideas and their words" (Levy 13). Therefore, muses originally represented female capability and the poet was no more than a medium or link between divine creativity and those he addressed. As Parker notes, she is "the absent presence towards whom the poet's words are directed" (89). Tracing back how the perception of the muse has changed throughout the ages, Parker further argues that, with the shifting of Ancient Greek mythology first to Roman then to Christian culture, "the concept of a divine, inspiring feminine power lived on, but became corporealized and connected to an actual, living woman" (Parker 92). In Christianity, this role was manifested in Virgin Mary who got songs of devotion from her disciples. These devotional songs later evolved to courtly love tradition in which "the divine and erotic aspects of the female muse are collapsed together; the muse becomes an unattainable mistress whom the poet worships" (Parker 93). This erotic aspect of the muse

eventually led to the emergence of the metaphor of male pregnancy which was used for artistic production. Poetry came to be considered as an offspring of the sexual intercourse between the poet and his muse, but, this was not a new understanding; the sexual implications between the poet and the muse were first asserted by Socrates. In Plato's *Phaedrus* Socrates regards poetic creativity as a kind of madness caused by muse-possession as follows:

> A third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses. It takes hold of a delicate, virgin soul and stirs it into a frenzy for composing lyric and other kinds of poetry, and so educates future generations by glorifying the countless deeds of the past. But anyone who approaches the doors of poetic composition without the Muses' madness, in the conviction that skill alone will make him a competent poet, is cheated of his goal. (27)

The idea of inspiration as a possession long intrigued the literary milieu as the figure of muse was essential to the poet's self-definition of himself as the maker. According to Beauvoir, "[o]nce the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him: he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself" (157). In line with this, DeShazer argues that:

> For the male poet, the invocation of a female muse—his particular way of naming an Other — leads ultimately to a strong sense of poetic autonomy, an identity vital to his creativity. *Although the poet is typically portrayed as possessed by his muse, in reality it is he who possesses, since the act of naming is by nature hierarchical*. (Italics mine, 2).

In this sense, the female muse became an essential component of the writer's self-definition. However, this hierarchical gendered paradigm of male poet-female muse brought about a literary riddle. When the poet was female, the hierarchical power relation between the poet and the muse was to be upside down. For her self-definition as an authority, the female poet needed another female figure which was symbolic and forced to serve only for male creative agency.

In a significant study concerning the problematic position of the female poet as the maker, Greer offers a different point of view concerning the female muse and the male poet paradigm. According to her, the female muse represents the female side of the male poet as he "considers himself a creative androgyne, his female part being externalized as his muse" (65). However, the female poet remains only female. In this regard, the self-

definition of the female poet as an authority is delayed for there is no male figure to complement the female poet to a creative androgyne. Greer also problematises the term "poetess," as "the longer the word, the less poet there is in it" (37). She further regards the term "female poet" as a "willed androgyny" (65). Greer's conclusion draws attention to the inadequacy of the patriarchal signifying system in defining the female poet and locating her in the paradigm. In the traditional understanding, as Graves asserts in his *The White Goddess* (1948), "woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing" (446). For instance, even Nancy Freedman who analyses Sappho in depth in her historical and biographical fiction gave the title of *Sappho: The Tenth Muse* (1998) to her work. When Anne Bradstreet's collection of her works was published without her knowledge, the title was *The Tenth Muse, Newly Sprung in America* (1650). Emphasising the hierarchical heterosexual relation between the writer and the muse, Spencer argues that the identification of the muse figure with the female poet was in fact a solution, which was developed to define the female poet in this hierarchical paradigm ("Imagining" 99). For instance, when a group of women wrote poems upon Dryden's death, they called themselves "the Nine Muses," to which the fictional critic Chagrin opposed in a pamphlet as follows: "What a Pox have the Women to do with the Muses? I grant you the Poets call the Nine Muses by the Name of Women, but why so? not because the Sex had anything to do with Poetry, but because in that Sex they're much fitter for prostitution" (qtd. in Spencer "Imagining" 99). In this context, the female poet had an ever-narrowing space where she could define herself as an authority and raise her voice.

In a similar vein, analysing the concept of "Victorian poetess," Brown draws attention to the fact that "[p]oetry is for women a mode, not an occupation," which she further clarifies as follows: "[f]or women writers, the major problem in this formulation is that women are poetry. They live and inspire it but they do not write it, while other people - namely, men - have the privilege to do so" (181). In this sense, in terms of accommodating herself in the tradition and claiming poetic authority, the female poet had a similar fate with the muse figure, which was reduced to a stereotypical passive inspirer in male literary imagination. Similar to muses, women could be the objects of literary texts. They could be addressed like invoked muses, but were not expected to address. Therefore, the female poets long remained absent presences even in their own

productions. Although they were present as the makers of their works, they were also absent because the female poetic authority was not recognised.

Clearly, both as a mythological figure and as a female representation, the concept of the muse was highly restrictive for women. On the one hand, as Murray observes, the image of the muse as an object inspiring the male poet but remaining silent herself created the idea that "man creates, woman inspires; man is the maker, woman the vehicle of male fantasy, an object created by the male imagination, incapable of any kind of agency herself" which "denies woman's active participation in artistic creation and silences female creativity" (327). On the other hand, sometimes muses did not even represent any capability at all. As Greer asserts, "almost as soon as Homer had invoked the muse in serious fashion, poets began to use the convention mock-modestly, apologizing for their personal muses as lazy, slip-shod, barren or unlettered" (5). The muse became almost a person of interest to be blamed for an unsuccessful text in which she is no more than an object.

Another subject that excluded woman from the position of the maker was the stereotypical representations of the female. In her analysis of Greek mythology and Biblical narratives, Dörschel draws attention to the fact that women were defined by their relations to men in these texts. She chooses examples from the greatest epics of Western literature, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and further analyses Odysseus's wife, Penelope, who is represented as loyal, skilful and obedient. The features that she bears are the personality traits that are expected from a wife according to the patriarchal ideal of a woman. Furthermore, although the goddesses are depicted as powerful female figures, they are also defined by their relation to male gods (4). In line with her argument, it is clear that the superiority of masculinity is evident in most mythological stories. For instance, three major gods of Greek mythology are males: Zeus, Poseidon and Hades. Hera, sister and wife of Zeus stands for a jealous housewife plotting against Zeus's love affairs. Abducted by Hades with the consent of her father Zeus, Persephone stands for a victimised woman who cannot make and perform a decision on her own. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, is depicted as an attractive woman who has got many lovers, like the mistresses in erotic love lyrics. Demeter, the goddess of harvest and fertility, stands for a devoted mother. Two goddesses; Artemis and Athena,

that are free of familial restrictions, are virgins. Regarding the Christian belief, the case becomes even clearer as there are two representations of women: one is pure and obedient Virgin Mary and the other is sinful Eve.

Similarly, analysing the Grimm's tale "Little Snow White," Gilbert and Gubar assert that traditionally there are two literary representations of women; one is the angel-woman and the other, monster-woman (36). The monster-woman is to be punished while the angel-woman is to be praised. However, either as a muse or an angel, the angelic representation of women is "to deny them human status (which does) and makes a nonsense of the individual woman's struggle for achievement" (Greer 2). In this vein, both angelic and demonic representations of women distorted the reality of womanhood, denied their literary achievement by reducing women into objects of texts rather than the subjects of them. In a similar vein, considering the Augustan literary tradition, Gilbert and Gubar's analysis is also well applicable to the definition of the female writer at the time. Aphra Behn was such a notorious writer that condemning her was perceived as a must for a chaste writing woman, while Katherine Philips, 'the Matchless Orinda,' was considered exemplary for succeeding female poets due to her chaste persona. Therefore, female poets had to define themselves within the border of patriarchal signifying system which restricted their identities with stereotypical representations. Their battle was "not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her" (Gilbert and Gubar 49). This required a re-presentation of authority as feminine with new or existing but altered tools.

The struggle of the female poet to assert authority brought about certain creative solutions. As stated above, in order to accommodate herself in the literary tradition and assert her own authority as a maker, the female poet had to first define herself within the borders of patriarchal social system in which she was defined by her relation to a man. According to Greer, "[i]t is only when women begin to make inroads on the male preserve that sophisticated strategies of devaluation begin to be employed" (11). The argument is well valid for the strategy that female poets followed; they certainly tried to make inroads on the male preserve and they employed sophisticated strategies. However, their attempt was not for devaluation, but for revaluation, a reassessment of themselves within the borders of a social system that denied their existence as

authorities. In order to achieve this, they created their own poetics out of the existing system by being, to use Ostriker's phrase, "[t]he thieves of language."[vi] They stole the language of the patriarchy and moulded it for their own ends in order to challenge the commonly accepted myths that prevented them from being creative agencies. The strategy that they developed was re-visioning, through which they could make corrections on the androcentric myths. Rich defines re-visioning as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (18). As the existing myths did not allow female writers to claim authority, they tried to achieve it through re-visioning, adapting and moulding them for their own purposes, and ultimately creating their own myths. In a similar vein, adapting the concept of "mythmaking" particularly to the poetic tradition, Ostriker coins the term "revisionist mythmaking" which she defines as follows:

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. (72)

In order to make cultural shifts and correct existing stereotypical representations of women as objects, female writers applied "hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (Ostriker 73-74). Although little space was left to them, they created a female literary tradition out of it. Within this tradition, female poets deserve great tribute since versifying was considered more of a serious occupation that should be kept in the male preserve. Although the emergence of this revisionist female literary tradition dates back to the nineteenth century, the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed many significant examples of it. It is possible to employ these terms in the analysis of Finch's poetry as she is one of the precursors of the revisionist literary tradition.

As a criticism of the assumed male superiority in the poetic tradition "The Circuit of Apollo" takes an important place among Finch's mythological poems. While going around "the lands of the Muses" (2), Olympian god of poetry, Apollo, discovers the city of Kent. As discussed in the introductory part of this study, Eastwell, Kent contributed much to Finch's literary aspirations and career. In this regard, she presents the city as a

land of muses. Apollo observes only few poets who are women and decides to encourage them. Finch does not include male poets in her own poetic myth. Being resolved to arrange a competition among them, Apollo will be the judge to choose the best and crown her with a wreath which is "the symbol of poetic achievement" (Seber 189). According to Mallinson, the poem is "a whimsical description of a contest among women poets, probably modelled on Suckling's 'A Session of the Poets'" (43). "A Session of the Poets" is, as Hinnant notes, "a popular, light-hearted, seventeenth-century genre in which Apollo is described as arranging a contest, usually among the male wits of the town, for the position of poet laureate. [It is] a subgenre based on the Salic Law of Wit—a law that excludes women from writing" (13). Clearly, Finch subverts the genre in order to criticise and disrupt the "Salic Law of Wit" which assumes men as superior talents and excludes women "by Appollo's [sic] law from Parnassus" (Williamson 166). In Finch's version, accordingly, the competitors are women; Alinda, Laura, Valeria and Ardelia. Although Aphra Behn is not a competitor as she is dead, Finch still praises her through Apollo's compliments. Seber draws attention to the fact that Apollo "directs the best of his praises to a worthy literary woman, but [one] who is dead" (190). As singling out one female poet and praising her is a way of degrading others (Greer 21), Apollo's compliment is reminiscent of the general attitude of the hypocritical male writers and critics of the time. On the other hand, the poem enables Finch to express her gratitude for her predecessors, Philips and Behn. In addition, it also enables her to oppose and reject the construction of female authority on these two models. As Barash asserts: "Finch is working against a tradition in which Philips and Behn represent different models of women's public writing, an ideological construction in which appropriate women's poetry is, like the ideal bourgeois woman, sexually modest and chaste" (*EWP* 285). In this regard, the persona of the poem praises and justifies Behn as follows:

> He lamented for Behn o're that place of her birth,
> And said amongst Femens was not on the earth
> Her superiour in fancy, in language, or witt,
> Yett own'd that a little too loosly she writt,
> Since the art of the Muse is to stirr up soft thoughts,
> Yett to make all hearts beat, without blushes, or faults, (11-16)

Evidently, Finch justifies Behn's writing in a common fashion that male poets could do for their texts. Although there is none on earth to compare her fancy, her language and her wit, she is still "own'd that a little too loosely . . . writt" (14). However, it is not Behn's fault, "[s]ince the art of muses is to stir up soft thoughts, / Yett to make all hearts beat, without blushes, or faults" (15-16). Similar to male poets' defence of their writings by addressing their muses and blaming them for any inconvenience, Finch defends Behn's asserted bawdiness as "the art of the muse." In saying so, Finch also criticises the hypocritical attitude of the male writers who attribute good works to themselves but blame their muses for those that might be attacked.

As the poem proceeds, the competitors come one by one and read their works, each more beautifully than the other. Finch uses pseudonyms for other competitors and does not identify them. It is known that Orinda is Katherine Philips's and Ardelia is Finch's pseudonyms, but, the identities of Valeria, Laura and Alinda remain uncertain. Existing also in "Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia," there is not even an implication identifying Alinda. According to Kennedy, one of these poets might be Sarah Dixon (1671-1765), an aspiring poet who published her writing at her sixties although she asserted that she began writing early in her life. Several connections that Finch and Dixon might possibly have urge the idea that Alinda might be Dixon. For Kennedy, Dixon was one of the poetic sisters of Finch in Kent (128-131). Based on the identification of the Valeria character in Susannah Centlivre's *The Basset-Table* (1705) with Mary Astell, the competitor Valeria might be Mary Astell. Laura is considered to be Mary of Modena whom Finch always admired and praised (Andreadis 125). Considering Finch's literary connections with Mrs. Randolph who gave the earliest tribute to her poetry, it is also possible to associate the character of Laura with her. However, none of these assumptions have ever been confirmed. The use of pseudonyms is significant in the sense that it illustrates a shift in the evolution of female poetic identity. All the competitors in the poem have their own pen-names and do not use male-pseudonyms. In this sense, although the real identities remain unknown or even might not even exist, referring to them with the pen-names that they might have chosen for themselves, Finch identifies her literary sisters as poetic authorities. On the other hand, by making her poetic self Ardelia one of the competitors, Finch constructs her own poetic identity as a poet expecting "least praise" (44), writing "for her pleasure and not for the Bays" (45)

and “not seeking for Fame” (49). Although she seems to be humble in her self-representation, through Apollo’s opinion about her, she cannot help giving tribute to herself: “But Appollo reply’d, tho’so carelesse she seemd, / Yett the Bays, if her share, wou’d be highly esteem’d” (51-52).

Even in her most humble verses, Finch never underestimates her effort and never neglects representing herself as a self-confident poet. Later in the poem, Apollo cannot decide the winner of the contest “[s]ince in Witt, or in Beauty, itt never was heard, / One female cou’d yield t’have another preferr’d,” (61-62). Although Apollo assumes that women will not appreciate one another’s success, it is later clarified that all are so fitting in the prize that he cannot decide:

> He changed his dessign, and devided his praise,
> And said that they all had a right to the Bay’s,
> And that t’were injustice, one brow to adorn,
> With a wreath, which so fittly by each might be worn.
> Then smil’d to himself, and applauded his art,
> Who thus nicely has acted so suttle a part,
> Four Women to wheedle, but found ’em too many,
> For who wou’d please all, can never please any. (63-70)

Clearly, all of them are capable enough to please with their poetry. However, Apollo cannot decide whom to declare the winner of the contest. By finishing the contest with no winner, Finch implies that all her poetic sisters are so talented that even Apollo cannot choose the best. She also represents Apollo as a hypocritical authority who first motivates the competitors and then disappoints them by leaving the contest unresolved for an insignificant task, “go[ing] drive on the day” (72). The poem ends in an ironic tone, as Seber argues, although the poem suggests that Apollo will be the judge, Finch makes the judgement, by referring to him as “so imprudent, so dull, or so blind” (77).

In “Upon Ardelia’s Return Home” a similar attitude displayed by Apollo is observed. At the beginning of the poem, the persona Ardelia, who has already returned home, foretells how the events have turned into a “Poetick Glory” (16). As the note at the beginning of the poem states, after walking for a very long time in Eastwell Park, Ardelia feels tired and decides to return home. Eastwell Park is a significant motif since it was inspirational for Finch in two senses: on the one hand, as observed in her nature meditations, it enabled her to observe nature in depth and therefore contributed to the

enhancement of her pastoral style. On the other hand, her stay in Eastwell corresponds to her most prolific years in terms of poetic achievement. In this sense Eastwell, as the setting of the poem is a metaphor for Finch's own poetic realm. Finch juxtaposes two places by describing herself in a shade and "so far had stray'd" (27) from home. Shade is a common metaphorical image that Finch employs in order to refer to her poetic territory. By employing the metaphor of shade, which will be discussed in depth in the third chapter of this study, Finch challenges the dark-light dichotomy and offers an alternative poetic realm for the female poet. As this poetic realm may also be interpreted as the public sphere, home might be an implication for the domestic sphere from which she is now away. In the next verse, Finch declares how she has arrived this far, tempted by fancy: "By the alluring Muse betray'd / By Fancies light of Nymphs and Faries / Romantick notions and figary's" (28-30). The fantastic description of Eastwell Park and the reference to the muse in the poem strengthen the argument that the setting is symbolic. It is a fantastic place where "Fawns and Sylvans dark abodes" (31) and "Heroes rush . . . from the woods" (32). Being first rejected by Phoebus and tired of walking, Ardelia encounters Apollo, who appears as arrogant as he is depicted in the previous poem. Ardelia asks him to take her to his chariot. As Mermin notes, it is a "traditional figure for a young man's poetical ambition, to go home in" (339). However, Ardelia's request is rejected because "'twou'd much disgrace him / To lett a female rider" (70-71). Apollo, the representative of male-dominated poetic tradition, rejects the young woman's poetical ambition and advises her to take the water cart waiting in the bushes nearby as he finds it more suitable to her. In her imagination, though, Ardelia turns it into a magnificent chariot:

> Yett Quixotts Brancart till he built itt
> A Velvett roof and richly gilt itt
> With Fancy's Pencil was not braver
> And with th'invention which he gave her
> She might convert wou'd she not spare itt
> This Roulo to tryumphant Charret
> Turn wood to steel and ropes to Leather
> And forehead bough to Ostrich Feather
> Since all was as opinion made itt
> Not as the Artists hand ore-laid itt. (84-93)

Apollo's rejection does not dismay Ardelia as she still has the art to make a great chariot of her own in her imagination. Finch emphasises the significance of imagination

for the female poet despite the restrictions imposed by the society and the literary tradition. At the end of the poem, Ardelia does not feel herself debauched due to Apollo's rejection; on the contrary, his rejection sharpens her creativity. This instance is an allegory of Finch's position in the literary tradition, that is, as a female poet, although she is rejected by the poetic tradition of the time, her art is enough to establish her own tradition. Similarly, Mallinson asserts that the poem is a "playful commentary" (75) on Finch's struggle as a female poet:

> Her vocation is undeniable: she has been following her Muse. If she cannot ride on the high horse reserved for male poets, she will, unfazed, adapt to this deprivation by accommodating herself to a lesser vehicle, and turning her very disadvantage, including humiliation, into poetry. In a sense . . . [the poem] is her way of explaining to herself, through her own inventive fancy, how she persisted in remaining a poet in spite of discouragement. (75-76)

In fact, the poem is about how Finch persisted in writing despite discouragements. Finch represents female creative agency as a power that can overwhelm the existing myths and she does not neglect mentioning her role in it. She challenges the myth of pacing Apollo's chariot for poetic achievement by implying that the real creativity is to make a chariot with limited sources. As it is foretold at the beginning of the poem, she succeeds in turning the discouragement into poetic glory.

Finch's determination as a persisting female poet is also observed in "To Mr. F. Now Earl of W." It is reported at the beginning of the poem that Flavio desires Ardelia to write some verses while he is abroad, in whichever subject she thinks fit. Although the poem includes autobiographical details, Ardelia as Finch herself and Flavio as her husband Heneage Finch, it deals with several issues in regard to the poetic tradition of the time. Being commissioned by her husband, Ardelia sets to work on writing verses without delay. She sends a messenger to the muses at Parnassus to ask for their urgent aid. The muses know Ardelia very well; however, she still expresses her distrust for the muses as follows:

> That many of that rhiming Train,
> On like Occasions, sought in vain
> Their Industry t'excite;
> But for ARDELIA all they'd leave:

Thus flatt'ring can the Muse deceive,
And wheedle us to write. (19-24)

The muses, despite being females, are represented as the tools of male literary imagination and therefore they stand for male poetic tradition. They summon Ardelia "[t]o know the Subject 'twas desir'd / On which they must infuse" (26-27). However, when they hear that it is intended for a husband, the muses are astonished and set up a council immediately:

A *Husband!* Eccho'd all around:
And to *Parnassus* sure that Sound
Had never yet been sent;
Amazement in each Face was read,
In haste th'affrighted Sisters fled,
And unto Council went. (37-42)

The muses decide to reject Ardelia's request as it is not common for a woman to write for a husband. Finch's mentioning of a husband's commissioning is an ironic reference to the current myths of her time since in those days "[t]he only man a respectable woman could write was her husband" (Rogers 227). Finch presents an image of conventional female poet seeking for justification. Therefore, as Rogers further asserts, Finch "cleverly makes use of the conventions to express her own deeper feelings" (227) such as her love for her husband and her criticism of the position of women. However, the problem is that muses do not reject Ardelia's request because she is a woman, they reject it because it is going to be addressed to a husband, which is unusual for a woman. Two interpretations might be drawn from this attitude. Firstly, this might be an ironic insinuation addressed to the bawdiness of her male contemporaries:

*Erato* cry'd, since *Grizel's* Days,
Since *Troy*-Town pleas'd, and *Chivey-chace*,
No such Design was known;
And 'twas their Bus'ness to take care,
It reach'd not to the publick Ear,
Or got about the Town: (43-48)

As McGovern asserts: [i]t is the duty of the Muses . . . to keep quiet this connubial relationship, for in such times of adulterous intrigues and illicit liaisons" (51). According to McGovern's argument, Finch criticises the bawdiness of her male contemporaries whose subject matters are mostly, as observed in Restoration plays, intriguing adulterous relationships. Secondly, Finch criticises the gendered nature of

lover-beloved relationship in the lyric genre. It would not be considered appropriate for a woman to write love lyrics even to her husband in a century when male poets could write for their mistresses quite overtly. All other muses except Urania reject aiding Ardelia for different reasons. For instance, Pegasus "of late had been / So often rid thro' thick and thin, /With neither Fear nor Wit; / In *Panegyrick* been so spurr'd" (61-64). Riding on Pegasus is a common metaphor for poetic achievement for the male poets. However, Pegasus is "spurr'd" lately "by the writers of extravagant eulogies" (McGovern 51) to such an extent that "He cou'd not from the Stall be stirr'd,/ Nor wou'd endure the Bit." (65-66). That is, Pegasus is so weary of inspiring poems which have no wit at all that he does not even pay heed to Ardelia's call for aid. Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, "had given a Bond, / By the new House alone to stand, /And write of War and Strife;" (67-69), therefore she, to use McGovern's words, "prostituted herself" (51) for a new house and will be writing of war. McGovern also observes a political undertone in this statement by referring to the writers who began to write of the new monarch after the Glorious Revolution (51). In this sense, Melpomene represents playwrights who changed sides after the revolution. Thalia, the muse of pastoral poetry and comedy, "had taken Fees, /And Stipends from the Patentees, / And durst not for her Life" (70-72). As she is well-paid for her services, she does not even condescend to respond to Ardelia's need. She is represented as a figure whose only concern is material gain. By ascribing new roles to the muses, Finch criticises the writers of the time who give into the demands of publishers and patrons in return for material gains. Evidently, the poem is almost an allusive literary criticism of the time. Among other muses, only Urania appreciates Ardelia's choice of subject matter:

> *Urania* only lik'd the Choice;
> Yet not to thwart the publick Voice,
> She whisp'ring did impart:
> They need no Foreign Aid,
> No help to draw a moving Stroke,
> Who dictate from the Heart. (73-78)

By putting the words into Urania's mouth, Finch expresses her own criticism of the poetic tradition. Invocation to muses, observed in the works of the male poets, is a vain effort, as no aid is needed for those "[w]ho dictate from the Heart" (78). Therefore, emotions have to be the source of inspiration for the female poet. Finch challenges the

myth of muse-inspired male poetic creativity. As the poem proceeds, Ardelia is resolved to "consult . . . now her Breast" (81). The poem ends with a resolution that true love must remain secret:

> For since the World do's so despise
> *Hymen's* Endearments and its Ties,
> They shou'd mysterious be;
> Till We that Pleasure too possess
> (Which makes their fancy'd Happiness)
> Of stollen Secrecy. (91-96)

According to Seber, the secrecy seems to be related to the small public that a woman poet could address (188). In this sense, it is also possible to interpret the love that she is discussing as Finch's love for versifying. In this poem Finch also seems to answer the question of female poet's muse, as her muse is no one but herself. Therefore, the self-confident tone in the last stanza is a confirmation of herself as an established poet, who does not need inspiration. Although the muses reject aiding her, as her determination at the end suggests, she is the one who rejects. As the muses are the figures of male fantasy and therefore stand for male poetic tradition, Finch rejects this constraining tradition as well. She implies that poetry can be produced without the help of the muses and true inspiration lies in one's own heart and imagination.

Similarly, in "From the Muses at Parnassus" Finch subverts the myth of inspiring passive female muse and inspired active male poet. According to Keith, "[i]n using the muse, many women explored their most basic rhetorical conflict: how to perform the poet's usual role as speaker in a literary tradition in which women and the 'feminine' functioned as objects of representation rather than as artists" (*Poetry* 51). As for Finch, although most of the time she does not apply to muses in her poems as male poets do, she sometimes "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" (Keith "The Poetics" 468). In this particular poem, Finch revises the myth of passive inspiring female muse by giving them authority as writers and therefore solves, to use Keith's words, "the most basic rhetorical conflict" (*Poetry* 51) in regard to the association of the feminine with the act of writing. The note at the beginning of the poem states that Parnassus is "a hill so call'd in Eastwell Park" (32). Evidently, Finch makes an analogy between Eastwell and Parnassus, the land of

the muses. In doing so, she both parodies the glorification of Parnassus by the male poets and at the same time introduces Eastwell as her poetic space. The poem starts with an address Lady Maidstone, the mother of Charles, the second earl of Winchilsea. It is written for the occasion of young earl's birthday. The persona of the poem continues with complimenting the place and expressing how joyful the muses are there. According to the persona, Parnassus is no different than the park: "And own, whilst here they reach the height of blisse, / their forked hill, was but a type of this" (7-8). Finch's attitude towards the muses and the celebration is double-edged: she either brings down the alleged divinity of the muses or she extols the young earl and Eastwell. Accordingly, Finch makes the inaccessible divine Parnassus their garden and the muses almost their servants, singing and celebrating his birthday:

> See where they come, their brows with lawrel bound,
> And hear the neighbouring woods, repeat the sound,
> Of silver harps, and voyces 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.
> Hark! How they sing the Line from whence he springs
> And trace his blood, until itt mix with Kings, (9-16)

According to Keith, the identity of the persona is merged to those of the muses. Throughout the poem, "the muses' references to themselves in the third person blur the distinction between their words and those of an implied author who may at times be describing them" ("The Poetics" 469). Clearly, Finch gives voice to the silent muse figures and ascribes them authoritative roles. Finch's muses, in this regard, differ from those of male poets', as hers are the creative agencies themselves. The persona of the poem further states that the muses "sing him Heir" (25), which is significant in two aspects. If the young earl can be an heir of the muses, it means he has a great poetic capability, which is true when the autobiographical undertone of the poem is taken into account. On the other hand, if the muses are able to claim someone heir, it means that they own the creative agency themselves since claiming heir is also claiming authority. In this regard, Finch liberates the muses from being the stereotypical objects of male literary imagination.

For Finch, mythological figures can be humans while humans can be as divine as the mythological figures. In a sense, she parodies the traditionally glorified representations

of mythological figures in order to challenge the poetic convention of her time. In her poem "The Following Lines," occasioned by the marriage of Edward Herbert and Mrs. Elizabeth Herbert. One day Cupid asks his mother when he should get married. His mother replies his question in a fashion that ordinary people might do: You're too Young, my Boy . . . / Nor has Nature made another /Fit to match with *Cupid*'s Bed" (3-5). Although most of the time mythological figures and their worlds are glorified, this time the god of love, Cupid emulates the mortals:

> *Cupid* then her Sight directed
> To a lately Wedded Pair;
> Where Himself the Match effected;
> They as Youthful, they as Fair. (6-9)

In order to glorify her friends, Finch does not extol them to the skies where gods and goddesses dwell, but rather brings them to ordinary life. Finch represents Cupid as a child-like docile boy. The poem ends with Cupid's finding a match suitable to him, who is Worseley. By representing mythological figures as ordinary people, Finch parodies the glorification of them by her male contemporaries.

A similar attitude is observed in "A Letter to the Same Person." In this particular poem, Finch revises the myth of divine inspiration. At the beginning of the poem the persona refers to love as the "President of Verse" (3) that "all his Servants write, or else rehearse" (4). Although poetic creativity is traditionally assumed to be a god-given gift, this time even the god of poetry is inspired by some other superior power, which is love:

> *Phoebus* (howe'er mistaken Poets dream)
> Ne'er us'd a Verse, till Love became his Theme.
> To his stray'd Son, still as his Passion rose,
> He rais'd his hasty Voice in clam'rous Prose:
> But when in *Daphne* he wou'd Love inspire,
> He woo'd in Verse, set to his silver Lyre. (5-10)

In classical mythology, divine inspiration comes from Apollo to the male poet. Therefore, a mortal poet has to be gifted by Apollo for high poetic success. However, in Finch's version of the myth, Apollo himself is overwhelmed by the power of love. Finch subverts the role of Apollo as a divine power and represents him as an ordinary lover. In doing so, she also emphasises the significance of love as the source of inspiration for the poet. The persona later states that "Love without Poetry's refining

Aid / Is a dull Bargain, and but coarsely made" (15-16). Finch justifies her writing love lyric to her husband because love will be a "dull bargain" if one does not write about it. The persona further asserts that without love, the verses will not be successful. Towards the end of the poem she draws attention to the restrictive nature of the language system in defining the emotions, saying ". . . the Thoughts of a Poetick Mind / Will never be to Syllables confin'd" (25-26). As it is revealed throughout the poem, the dichotomy between the male subject and the female object is subverted as in most of her poems, in which "woman appears not as an object to be idealized or fantasized about, but a human subject expressing her own feelings" (Rogers 239).

Finch also applies mythological stories as anecdotes in order to emphasise the necessity of gender equality, particularly in the field of artistic production as in "The Answer." The poem is written as a response to Alexander Pope's "Impromptu to Lady Winchilsea." In his poem, Pope flatters Finch's talent as a female poet by comparing her to other female writers preceding her. As mentioned above, Pope and Finch had a strong literary friendship. The common tendency in the literary tradition of the time was to favour the accomplishments of the male writers and Pope is known to be one of the most prominent Augustan writers. Pope's poem addresses Finch and aims to praise her talent while asserting the fact that the female wit is doomed to vanish. For Pope, it is a vain effort for Finch to praise female writers before her, as "[e]ven while. . . [she] write[s],. . . [she] take[s] that praise away" (10). It is commonly acknowledged that Pope did not approve of female literary talent. Even while praising his friend, he ignores and underestimates other female poets. According to Knellwolf, "[t]he exceptional position which he gallantly grants her still shows his general hostility to female writing" (112). By favouring one female poet over many, Pope degrades the others. However, Finch does not flatter herself with Pope's praises in "Impromptu." She positions herself as the defender of female poetic community. Being aware of the patronising attitude of Pope towards female writers, Finch begins the poem with a warning:

> Disarm'd with so genteel an air,
> The contest I give o'er;
> Yet, Alexander, have a care,
> And shock the sex no more. (1-4)

Finch addresses Pope with his name in order to emphasise their equal status in the literary tradition despite the common tendency of favouring the male writers. In the following lines, Finch draws attention to the power of the female "race" with a self-assertive tone. She begins the address in the first person plural as a representative of female solidarity:

> We rule the world our life's whole race,
> Men but assume that right;
> First slaves to ev'ry tempting face,
> Then martyrs to our spite. (5-8)

Later, she reminds Pope of the fate of Orpheus who left his wife in hell and soon, according to Finch, was punished by the resentful heroines:

> You of one Orpheus sure have read,
> Who would like you have writ
> Had he in London town been bred,
> And polish'd to[o] his wit;
> But he poor soul thought all was well,
> And great should be his fame,
> When he had left his wife in hell,
> And birds and beasts could tame.
> Yet venturing then with scoffing rhimes
> The women to incense,
> Resenting Heroines of those time
> Soon punished his offence. (9-20)

Finch makes an analogy between exclusion of women from literary achievement and Orpheus's leaving Eurydice in the underworld by mistake. In Finch's poem Eurydice represents the unacknowledged female writers. In her version, Finch appropriates the myth to the current situation of female writers by making Orpheus represent the arrogant male voice which discards female literary talent. Moreover, Orpheus is not depicted as a talented musician, but rather as an ordinary husband who seems to get rid of his wife. Finch's treatment of the myth is subversive. As Mallinson argues,

> [h]er comic treatment of the Orphic myth deflates the figure of Orpheus to the status of a poor husband who thought, after abandoning his wife in hell, that he was well and truly rid of women, but found to his sorrow that incensed women became 'Resenting heroines' who pursued him to an ignominious end. (70)

As the poem proceeds, Finch reminds the fate of Orpheus who was torn limb from limb by the frenzied Maenads. It is emphasised that at the end, it is women who prevail. In this regard, the underestimation of female literary talent will result in failure and attacks as in the myth. Finch's tone is highly assertive and, to some extent, threatening. In the twenty fifth line, Finch acknowledges the follies of female writers and begins to soothe his friend in an implicitly threatening tone with a reference to "The Rape of the Lock":

> But you our follies gently treat,
> And spin so fine the thread,
> You need not fear his awkward fate,
> The lock wo'n't cost the head. (25-28)

The poem ends with an address to female writers who, to Finch, are ". . . born to wit, but to be wise / By admonitions taught" (35-36). It is significant that, unlike Pope, Finch does not distinguish herself from other female poets but rather positions herself as their representative. In this sense, Finch responds to Pope's poem not only with words, but also with her attitude and revisionist attempts.

In addition to the use of classical mythology, Finch also makes use of Biblical stories and characters in order to revise and reinterpret them. In these poems, she usually places some details and her own evaluation of the stories with her point of view as a female poet. For instance, in her most quoted poem "The Introduction," she revises the myth of the Return of the Ark by adding some details to the original narrative as well as drawing attention to the commonly ignored points. The poem is generally considered as a manifestation of Finch's condemnation of the position of women in her society. Generally the critics focus on the lines that criticise the myths which exclude women from an active public life. However, Finch's revisionist strategy is also observed at certain points. The poem starts with Finch's particular concern about the attitude of the critics of her time:

> Did I, my lines intend for publick view,
> How many censures, wou'd their faults persue,
> Some wou'd, because such words they do affect,
> Cry they're insipid, empty, and uncorrect.
> And many, have attain'd, dull and untaught,
> The name of Witt only by finding fault.
> True judges might condemn their want of Witt,
> And all might say, they're by a Woman writt. (1-8)

In these lines Finch clarifies that she does not write for the public or expect fame. She further asserts that, if she intended to do so, it would be received unfavourably. As Seber also argues, "[t]he 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" (185). The poem continues with the most quoted lines of Finch:

> Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
> Such an intruder on the rights of men,
> Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,
> The fault can by no vertue be redeem'd. (9-12)

Clearly, Finch realises that men regard writing woman as "an intruder on the rights of men," since artistic production is considered a male occupation that women should not take up. Moreover, she criticises the gender stereotyping that dictates women "[g]ood breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play" (14) as the "accomplishments [that they] should desire" (15). Similarly, "[t]o write, or read, or think, or to inquire" (16) would only overshadow their beauty and waste their time (16). According to Finch, the Bible is not a guide that dictates female submission. As Barash notes, "[i]n the Old Testament, Finch finds both submissive women, dangerously swayed by popular opinion, and models of the poet and *femme forte*" (*EWP* 271). In an age when "the Bible was constantly used to keep woman in her place" (Rogers 235) Finch never criticises the Bible for being sexist, but rather directs her criticism to those who, in her opinion, interpret it incorrectly. As the grateful tone in her religious poems also imply, she believes in the justice of God in terms of distributing equal shares to people. For this reason, she revisits the existing myth and writes her own to prove that in the earlier times women had a more active public life:

> Sure 'twas not ever thus, nor are we told
> Fables, of Women that excell'd of old;
> To whom, by the diffusive hand of Heaven
> Some share of witt, and poetry was given. (20-23)

Accordingly, she describes the Biblical story of the Return of the Ark, to show how actively women could participate in public occasions in those times:

> On that glad day, on which the Ark return'd,
> The holy pledge, for which the Land had mourn'd,

The joyfull Tribes, attend itt on the way,
The Levites do the sacred Charge convey,
Whilst various Instruments, before itt play;
Here, holy Virgins in the Concert joyn,
The louder notes, to soften, and refine,
And with alternate verse compleat the Hymn Devine. (24-31)

As Barash also observes, Finch describes a possible scene for the aftermath of the triumph of the Return of the Ark and places the story in the Biblical narrative. In her version, the chorus of holy virgins who do not exist in the original narrative also attend the concert (*EWP* 271). Moreover, they sing with "louder notes," and complete the hymn divine, which is significant in the sense that, as implied, if they would not exist, the song would be incomplete. By adding such details to the Biblical narratives and mythological stories, Finch also draws attention to the arbitrariness of myths which can be moulded to the purpose of the interpreter. As the poem proceeds, Finch draws attention to an ignored Biblical figure, Deborah, who leads her fainting nation Israel, fights, wins and rules her nation with her laws. According to the Bible, being the wife of Lapidoth, Deborah was a prophetess and a ruler (Judges 4:4-6). Besides, she is a poetess singing songs together with Barak after avenging Israel (Judges 5:1). By referring to Deborah, who was a heroic woman, a "femme forte" (5), to use Barash's phrase, Finch draws attention to the false assumption about female inferiority which is claimed to be dictated in the Bible. According to Finch originally Christianity does not dictate male superiority. While describing Deborah's deeds, Finch particularly draws attention to her poetic side:

A woman here, leads fainting Israel on,
She fights, she wins, *she trymphs with a song,*
*Devout, Majestick, for the subject fitt,*
*And far above her arms, exalts her witt;*
*Then, to the peacefull, shady Palm withdraws,*
And rules the rescu'd Nation, with her laws." (Italics mine, 44-49)

Clearly, the phrases that describe Deborah's poetic achievements outweigh those which describe her heroic deeds. The metaphor of shade that Finch employs to refer to the female poetic realm is also used in the story of Deborah. The poem draws attention to the fact that the secondary position of women in her society is not a religious dictation, but rather an ideological construction. The poem shows how false assumptions about women emerged as a result of false education:

> How are we fal'n, fal'n by mistaken rules?
> And education's, more then Nature's fools,
> Debarr'd from all improve-ments of the mind,
> And to be dull, expected and dessign'd; (51-54)

For Finch, it is a designed act to keep women ignorant; therefore, it is not their nature but the culture that disables them. Clearly, it is not Christianity, but the "mistaken rules" that dictate female inferiority. Women are not naturally fools, but they are intentionally forced to be so by being debarred from education. In this regard, they are not naturally but culturally disadvantaged in terms of wit. Although some critics regard the ending of the poem as depressing, Finch states she will continue writing with "contracted wing[s]," though to a small audience.

The problematisation of the alleged male superiority through Biblical narratives is also observed in "Adam Pos'd." At the beginning of the poem it is stated that Adam has already fallen from the Garden of Eden which is obviously not a result of Eve's fault as she is absent in the scene. He has to give appellations to each kind, which is the main point that Finch draws attention to. Considering the fact that naming is a way of claiming authority over something, it is clear that Finch reinterprets the understanding of male superiority in Christianity through her ironic treatment of Adam's naming process. As also reflected in "The Introduction," she believes that Christianity does not dictate the superiority of any sex. In order to underline the false assumptions about male superiority, the poet describes Adam's labour in a mock-heroic tone. Adam's giving "Appellations" to things surrounding him is resembled to "toilsome Plough" which he seems to be fulfilling with great difficulty:

> Cou'd our First father, at his toilsome plough,
> Thorns in his Path, and Labor on his Brow,
> Cloath'd only in a rude, unpolish'd Skin,
> Cou'd he a vain Fantastick Nymph have seen,
> In all her Airs, in all her antick Graces,
> Her various Fashions, and more various Faces;
> How had it pos'd that Skill, which late assign'd
> Just Appellations to Each several Kind!
> A right Idea of the Sight to frame;
> T'have guessed from what New Element she came;
> T'have hit the wav'ring form, or giv'n this Thing a Name. (1-11)

However, this great "Skill" is interrupted by "a vain Fantastick Nymph" (4), a woman. The most significant feature of the nymph is her "wav'ring form." By giving names to the things around him, Adam designates fixed identities to them. However, the nymph has "various fashions, and more various faces" (6). In this regard, naming this new kind does not seem possible. As McGovern asserts, "[t]he poem becomes a subtle assertion that women cannot be categorized nor molded into structures created and dominated by male rationality" (145). In this sense, Finch draws attention to the misleading nature of representations as any representational attempt towards such an unstable character might result in false and deficient assumptions.

It is also possible to interpret this "new element" as the female writer. As Seber notes, "[f]or Adam, Eve is a new element, somehow an intruder in his world, just like a woman poet in poetic tradition" (184). In this sense, Adam represents the poetic tradition that does not welcome female authorship. Consequently, the "wav'ring form" of the nymph signifies the female poet's undefined position in the literary tradition, which Finch seems to be content with. For Finch, the female poet cannot be stereotyped.

Through her revisionist attempts, Finch deconstructs the mythological worlds and the myths that have been built upon them. When the society and the poetic tradition of her time dictate gender stereotypes that deny female active creative agency, she neither yields to nor rebels against them, but rather she re-visions and corrects them. Although the use of mythology is an indicator of classical learning, Finch uses mythology for different purposes. She disrupts the alleged divinity and inaccessibility of the mythological figures in order to challenge the male-dominated poetic convention and the constructed stereotypical representations of women. In Finch's mythological poems, Apollo becomes a hypocritical authority while her garden is almost Parnassus and the muses are her servants. Similarly, she appropriates gods, goddesses and muses in daily occasions. Mythological worlds offer Finch a realm in which cultural shifts can be made through re-visioning. In her revisionist attempts, Finch gives voice to silenced female figures or/and brings a female viewpoint to the mythological stories by offering new interpretations. In addition to this, she also appropriates Biblical narratives and makes alterations in them in order to draw attention to the false assumptions about male

superiority which is based on these narratives. For her, Christianity does not dictate subordination of women. She illustrates that it is culture which silences women.

# CHAPTER II

## SUCH AN INTRUDER IN THE WORLD OF BEASTS: ANNE FINCH THE FABULIST

I could end this with a moral,
as if this were a fable about animals,
though no fables are really about animals.
-- Margaret Atwood, *The Tent*

In Fable, all Things hold discourse
Then Words, no doubt, must talk, of course.
-- John Gay, "Ay and No"

Unlike most of her male and female contemporaries, Finch also wrote fables, which became a popular literary form in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries due to the changing political environment. The disenfranchised writers with Stuart sympathy preferred to express their concerns in a seemingly non-threatening medium after the Glorious Revolution. The world of fable offered a safe zone for such writers including Finch. She contributed much to the development of the English fable with Gay by adding local colour to the fables of La Fontaine and by appropriating them to the current events of the time, but, the way she employs the genre is more of "free adaptations" (Hinnant 169); therefore, her fables are, to some extent, original in nature. The world of fables offers Finch two advantages: on the one hand, it helps her establish an alternative world where she could enjoy the "freedom of inventive representation" (Blackham 242) through a non-threatening medium. With the genre of beast fable, Finch is able to "liberate poetry from the force of reality and play with the possibilities available to poetry" (Hinnant 73). In the allegorical and representational world of fables, Finch plays with the possibilities of representation by making alterations in the original texts. Considering her high sensibility in regard to the gender issues, with these alterations, she brings a female point of view to the fable genre. On the other hand, choosing not much popular genres, Finch was aware that she could distinguish herself as well as exhibit her talent more freely. Instead of competing with her male contemporaries in mediums that were reserved for them, Finch preferred to establish her own space with what was left.

When John Ogilby (1600-1676) published his translation, *The Fables of Aesop Paraphrs'd in English Verse* in 1651 as a small quarto, the Aesopian fable was not a new genre for the English reading public. For instance, in 1486 when the first English press had been set, William Caxton printed *The Book of the Subtyll Histories of Aesop.* Before that, such fabulists as Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400) in England and Robert Henryson (1425-1500) in Scotland had already taken a hand in writing fables. According to Lewis, Ogilby's originality lies in his "use of the physical body of the book to establish the fame of a modern English poet, as well as to integrate the poetic present with the classical past" (17). Literature of a particular period is generally in close contact with culture and history. Accordingly, in Ogilby's works the reflections of the seventeenth-century English social and political atmosphere is clearly observed. Ogilby did not only translate Aesopian fables, he also Anglicised them with puns and references particularly regarding the conflicts of his time (Lewis 17). When Ogilby published his translation, the English Civil Wars occupied the English political agenda. For this reason, his translations involve political undertones in regard to the Cromwellian government. Furthermore, Ogilby initiated the revival of the genre which later went far beyond it and turned into a safe zone for Augustan English writers who wished to make critical statements.

In general terms, fable refers to "a short narrative, in prose or verse, that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principal of human behaviour; usually at its conclusion, either the narrator or one of the characters states the moral" (Abrams and Harpham 9). However, in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England, fables, particularly the Aesopian fables became a medium of discussion and criticism of the current political power relations. In this context, it is possible to apply Blackham's definition of fable as an "extended metaphor" which includes "a compound reference to the image presented and the conception represented" (xiii) to the post-Revolution English literature. The fabulists of the period made use of the metaphorical power of the fable genre in order to discuss their concerns. Loveridge explicates the relationship between the seventeenth-century English fabulists and Aesopian fable tradition in terms of Aesop's situation as a slave speaking to his masters that is reflected in his style. He further asserts that, "Aesopian fables often develop the Wolf-eat-Lamb morality of animal appetite, dominance and, natural hierarchy in order to figure the worlds of social

and political relationship" (6). Particularly in the post-Revolution English society, Aesop (600 BC) became a spokesman for the oppressed and Aesopian fable writing became popular among disenfranchised writers. They employed the form to express their political concerns and critical statements. Furthermore, it was not reserved for only one side of opposing factions. Fables appeared in Whig pamphlets as well as Tory periodicals (Lewis 1).

According to Lewis, the rise of the fable genre during the Williamite period depends on its "seemingly innocent preoccupation with animal affairs" while offering "ways to resist the prevailing political tide" (25). As a seemingly simple and non-threatening medium, the fable enabled most writers to reiterate their political propaganda in their works. In this sense, most disenfranchised writers took their hands in fable writing. Although such well-known writers as Jonathan Swift, Aphra Behn and Matthew Prior translated and wrote fables, four writers can be regarded as the major fabulists of the period after Ogilby: Roger L'Estrange (1616-1704), John Dryden (1631-1700), John Gay and Anne Finch. The periods during which they adapted fables differ from Ogilby's as do the political environment entailed by their time. All these writers are known to have Stuart sympathies and wrote in the period covering the Glorious Revolution and its aftermath. They fell into a politically disadvantaged status as Nonjurors right after the Revolution. Although sometimes they wrote satirical fables about human follies in general, the sense of displacement and political tone are strong features of most of their fables. In 1692 Roger L'Estrange's collection of Aesop fables appeared. In 1700 Dryden's *Fables Ancient and Modern*, which is comprised of verse paraphrases of the tales by Chaucer, Ovid, Homer and Boccaccio, was published. In 1722 Samuel Croxall's prose Aesop collection appeared. Croxall had political intentions in his use of fable genre, but he used it to express his Whig opinions. Gay's collection appeared in 1727, which is deemed to be the first collection of "original and thoroughly English Aesopian fables" (Pritchard 1). It is significant that towards the 1720s the development of the English fable as a literary form was observed. Significantly, before that time fable existed mostly in the curriculum of school teaching rather than a literary form. In this sense, the development of the English fable entailed both its appropriation to the social life and to the Augustan literary canon.

Fable appealed to the writers of the period for several reasons. Patterson puts forward three uses of Aesopian fables in the late-seventeenth English society: "First, of course, it was good for the moral education of young children. Second, it participated in the general dignity of symbolic discourse in antiquity. . . And third, unsurprisingly, it was necessary as a vehicle for otherwise prohibited political criticism" (133-4). The pedagogical use of fables turned into both an advantage and a disadvantage. For one thing, it easily enabled the fabulists to promulgate their political and satirical purposes and for the other, it guaranteed the position of the fable genre in children's literature as a non-serious medium especially when compared to satire, the dominant taste of the time. In addition to its moral purposes, fables were also used to teach grammar to children (Lewis 3). The efficiency of fables was further asserted by John Locke in 1692 when he suggested teaching Latin would be easier if Aesop fables were read by the pupils along with their English translations (238-39). However, the reduction of the fable genre to children's literature did not prevent writers from using it. On the contrary, its popularity increased due to its seemingly non-threatening nature.

Being a contemporary of Homer, Aesop also appealed to the Augustan writers due to their dependence on antiquity as their sources. Lewis draws attention to the position of Aesop among the first Augustans namely Phaedrus, Horace and Cicero. Following the footsteps of their ancestors, such neoclassical writers and critics as John Dennis (1657-1734), John Dryden (1631-1700) and Thomas Rymer (1641-1713) viewed fable as the "backbone of literature" (Lewis 49). Therefore, contrary to the common assumption, fable was not a minor genre, at least for some Augustans. In addition to this, as Hinnant asserts, "[t]he fable belongs with the irregular Pindaric ode as one of the master texts through which the writers of the time tested their capacities" (166). Although fable is perceived as a genre of children's literature, it is a serious mode—both due to its content and its classical form that has to be employed carefully. The difficulty of fable writing is also asserted by the accomplished writers of the time. Gay refers to the fable as the most difficult kind of writing, which is also agreed by Swift, by saying that when he finished one he had the anguish of finding another (Reynolds cix, Hinnant 167). Therefore, to place the fable in the category of children's literature and to regard it as a simple and loose form will be an underestimation of it when its relation to antiquity and

its usage in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century English socio-political atmosphere are considered.

This genre also appealed to the Augustans, particularly to those with political concerns, due to its conventions that might be moulded to their purposes. For instance, as Pritchard observes, "the inherent anonymity of the genre," provided concealment for the political fabulists as "[e]very fabulist becomes an Aesop, so that even when he publishes his fables in his own name, the implicit presence of the Aesop-narrator introduces a distance into the reader's response" (13). Although the writers referred to a source material and pretended to be translators or adaptors, the narration still belonged to them. They could make omissions or additions to the original text in order to adapt them to the current social and political issues as well as adding some local colour. In this sense, Aesop as the writer of the original texts became an absent present in narration; he was both mentioned and distanced. Fables also enabled these writers to assert moral authority that traditionally belongs to Aesop due to its didactic nature (Pritchard 14-15). As the writer of the fable has the authority to instruct, the political fabulists applied the convention to express their own concerns. In addition, the flexibility of fable collections also enabled these writers to select texts that were suitable for their agendas (Pritchard 15).

In addition to its political use, Aesopian fable was also a good medium to satirise human follies and vices in general. Therefore, as the century went on, the fables that satirise follies of people became prominent due to the changing political atmosphere. From the Hanoverian succession in 1714 onwards a more moderate political climate was achieved, as a result, "[t]he political agenda was dropped for a social one in the manner of La Fontaine" (Barua 15). It is significant that "the manner of La Fontaine" does not necessarily mean that he was the initiator of this mode in England. It refers to his style which was adapted to the English social life. In addition, as Barua notes, in this style, the significance of the moral was outweighed by the medium, which was a significant step towards the development of the English fable as a literary form. It enabled the fabulists to create their own individualistic styles.

In regard to the development of the English fable, great credit is given to John Gay, who published his *Fables* in 1728. As Reynolds notes, he has always been regarded as "the

progenitor of the race of verse fable-writers in England" (cviii). His distinctiveness primarily lies in his adaptation of the versified La Fontaine mode instead of prose Aesopian narrative style while establishing his own style by appropriating the fable form to English social life. Although Gay is commonly deemed to be the progenitor, particularly in regard to his employment of La Fontaine mode, Anne Finch was the first to adopt this style (Reynolds cix). She adjusted the conventions of the fable form to her political concerns as her male contemporaries did, and brought a female point of view to the tradition with her appropriations and interpretations.

Fables constitute at least one-third of Finch's works. According to William Wordsworth, Finch "was unlucky in her models--Pindaric Odes and French Fables" (229). He believed that Finch could have been more popular and successful if she had focused on writing lyrics. Evidently, Wordsworth had a tendency to include Finch in the Romantic tradition, for this reason, he believed that fables did not show her potential and talent. Lewis aptly puts it: "[t]o see Finch in light of her failures and deviations from perceived socio-political and literary protocols, however, is to fail to imagine how she might have converted those deviations into illuminating and constructive rhetorical strategies" (132). In this sense, she was evidently not unlucky in her models as Wordsworth suggested, because she used fables strategically. Several assumptions might be made in regard to why Finch chose the fable as her mode. According to Patterson, fables "functioned as a self-protective mode of communication, whether by a slave addressing the Master society, or by an aristocrat whose party is currently in defeat" (5). Patterson also describes Finch's position as a political outsider. It is undeniable that the political implications are observable in most of her fables. Considering the rising popularity of the fable genre during the times of oppression and political upheavals, fable was an appropriate mode for the disenfranchised writers. To this end, similar to such accomplished male fabulists as L'Estrange and Dryden, Finch also utilised the genre to take refuge in its seemingly simple style. According to Messenger, Finch felt free "under the guise of the fiction to let her satiric spirit have its way far more openly than in other works she had published" (31). Apparently, excluding "Upon the Death of King James the Second" and "On the Death of the Queen," in her fables Finch expresses her political concerns more freely than she does in her songs, odes and lyrics.

Barua observes that, "[d]eprecation of the subject matter at hand, overt acknowledgement of sources and thus relegation of blame to source material for any offence given, were strategies employed by most fable writers" (42). Therefore, the concealment is two dimensional. On the other hand, the seemingly simple and humble tone and the representational and allegorical world in fables enable the writer to work in his/her personal point of views on a particular subject. Additionally, freedom from actuality in the world of fables opened the doors of an allegorical world to Finch where she could assert authority. Moreover, the existence of a source material despite many alterations would protect the writer from severe attacks. The fact that Finch models her career as a fabulist on La Fontaine also justifies it. As Aesopian fables became popular among the fabulists with political intentions, she tended to adapt already translated texts, therefore twice removed from the original texts. In this way, Finch almost rewrites the fables while bringing her own point of view sometimes through alterations of characters and/or events and sometimes through adding local colour and autobiographical details.

Finch's position as an outsider was not only due to her political stance. As a female writer in the Augustan period, Finch was in a doubly-disadvantaged position; therefore, fable was an appropriately prudent mode to adopt. However, this position enabled her to be mentioned with her contributions to the genre. Backscheider observes three contributions that Finch made to the fable tradition:

> First, she continued a movement now traced to John Ogilby to make fables about English events and structures of feeling; second, she demonstrated how the form can weave writing into the fabric of social life; and third, she moved the fable in an entirely new direction by using it to comment on the situation of women. (44)

Her commentary on the situation of women is manifested in the representations of her characters. In fact, her involvement in fable writing is a challenge against the position of women in the tradition. She disrupts the male dominance in the fable genre and becomes an "intruder" in the world of fables. According to Barua,

> By writing her fables Finch subverts the opposition of male speaker/female listener roles by combining the two roles. As a fabulist she 'imitates' her French and English predecessors, thus displacing

> herself as originator of the works, yet her very attempt at imitation subverts earlier female non-participation in the genre. (53)

Besides, and most significantly, Finch is not only perceptibly involved in the genre as a person, she also offers female point of view to the interpretations of the tales through alterations such as identifying the genders of her characters as females which are males in the original texts and using descriptions that are familiar to the female experience. Her characters are generally females; thus, the reader is introduced to female point of view. Occasionally the "he" pronouns in La Fontaine's texts are changed to "she" in her narratives. Considering Finch's challenges in regard to the position of women and her self-confident manner which is disguised by her self-depreciative and apologetic tone, her adoption of the fable genre seems strategic. Finch is not only a marginalised female fabulist but also a writer who intentionally marginalises herself. She includes herself and her style in a masculine tradition that even such respected male writers as Gay and Swift (Reynolds cix) assert the hardships which it entails. Her self-marginalisation urges her to establish her own poetic authority. As Rogers puts forward, Finch,

> satirized deviations from reason. But the enforced detachment from the fashionable world - - attributable mostly to her sex - sharpened her ability to see where accepted social norms diverged from reason. As an outsider, she was better qualified to evaluate the ideals of the dominant group. (39)

Finch was aware of the fact that her marginalised position would sharpen her creativity. This awareness is best manifested in her poem "On Myselfe," as she directly asserts her thankfulness for her marginalisation from the male-dominant literary tradition: "Good Heav'n, I thank thee, since it was design'd / I shou'd be framed, but of the weaker kinde," (1-2). She further regards herself as rescued from "Love of all those Trifles" (3). According to Finch, her male contemporaries are not as free and genuine as her in their styles. She further asserts that the necessity entails the invention: "If they're deny'd I on my selfe can Liue" (9). Seemingly resenting her displacement, in fact, Finch asserts her own capability as the mother of her own tradition. Her statements are quite determined. The poem ends with the overt assertion of her own poetic realm: "When in the Sun, my wings can be display'd, / And in retirement, I can bless the shade" (11-12). Although Finch reflects her high sensibility in regard to the secondary position of women in the literary milieu in most of her poetic works, she does not seem to

personally resent her marginal position, but rather overtly and covertly appreciates it. According to McGovern; "[w]riting from a marginal position in her social and literary milieu, she often viewed her exclusion from masculine traditions as a challenge to her creativity, rather than a repression of it" (5). In this sense, choosing fable as her mode, Finch again identifies herself as an established writer.

If Ogilby utilised the mode to "establish the fame of a modern English poet" (Lewis 17), Finch established the fame of a modern English female fabulist. Although her fables are generally interpreted with regard to the political tide of the time, Finch's concern about the position of women is also manifested in some of her fables. For the sake of convenience and coherence, only the fables, in which Finch's criticism of the position of women is observed, are going to be discussed throughout this chapter. Before analysing the texts, her poem "The Critick and the Writer of the Fables" is going to be analysed for a better understanding of why she chooses fable as her mode.

"Critick and the Writer of Fables," which is an adaptation of La Fontaine's "Contre ceux qui ont le Gout difficile," translated to English as "Against those who are Hard to Please,"[vii] is Finch's discussion of why she chooses the fable genre as her mode. As Lewis observes, it was rare among the fabulists to release their collections without a long preface of intention (4). However, this poem is placed in the middle of Finch's miscellany and is followed by thirty four fables, excluding "Mercury and the Elephant" as it is placed at the beginning even before "The Introduction" and "The Preface." The poem begins with the writer's resolution to write fables:

> Weary, at last, of the *Pindarick* way,
> Thro' which advent'rously the Muse wou'd stray ;
> To *Fable,* I descend, with soft Delight,
> Pleas'd to Translate, or easily Endite :
> Whilst aery Fictions hastily repair
> To fill my Page, and rid my Thoughts of Care,
> As they to Birds and Beasts new Gifts impart,
> And teach, as Poets shou'd, whilst they Divert. (1-8)

The tone that the writer adopts suggests that fable is not a high ranked mode of writing, as she "descend[s]" to it. She regards fables as "aery fictions" and reveals her intention in adopting them as filling page and amusement, evidently for no serious reason. However, the writer is well aware of the power of fables particularly when intended to

instruct the reader. This depreciative tone dissuades the reader from questioning if any other intention is present in this resolution. In the second stanza, it is stated that the critic is displeased with the writer's choice of the epic, as it is also despised for being out of date.

Finch prepares the ground for any possible criticism and attack from the critics by presenting her reasons and by implicitly justifying herself in her statements. According to Barua, the poem is in the form of a "defensive monologue" as the critic and writer are already fictive characters of the same mind (30). In this vein, Finch implicitly defends her choice of mode while suggesting her reasons in the first stanza. The second and third stanzas are rather in the form of possible criticisms to be directed. Finch ironically draws attention to the power of critics in determining the taste of time in the third stanza as follows: "Is this the way to please the Men of Taste, / The Interrupter cries, this old Bombast?" (27-28). It is implied that art is no longer for art's sake, the primary purpose of it has become pleasing for the "Men of Taste." According to Hinnant this is "an incipiently sceptical poem, unwilling to give full authority and credence to the poet's own affirmations. Indeed, its very acknowledgement of the poet's inability to gain assent from the critic to her claims betrays uneasiness about the validity of her assertions" (239). The writer, in this regard, has limited freedom in choosing the form and the subject matter. Additionally, she does not use a gender neutral term such as "people of taste" to draw attention to the male dominance in the tradition. In the next stanza, the writer offers pastoral which is also rejected for being dull. Thereafter, the critic recommends satire:

> But urge thy Pen, if thou wouldst move our Thoughts,
> To shew us private, or the publick Faults.
> Display the Times, *High-Church* or *Low* provoke;
> We'll praise the Weapon, as we like the Stroke, (45-48)

However, the writer is not pleased with this recommendation: "And all the Rest of *Helicon* be dry? / And when so many choice productions swarm, / Must only Satire keep your Fancies warm?" (53-55). Significantly, the major anxiety of the writer arises from the critic's power of influence upon the writer's choices. It is implied that the tradition is so restrictive that it minimises the power of the writer /subject upon the text/object. For this reason, "The Critick and the Writer of Fables" can be regarded as a literary criticism of the time. Besides, as satire is considered a serious mode that is

commonly associated with masculinity, critic's refusal of all other literary forms except satire excludes the female writer from the tradition. The poem ends with suspense, as the writer neither accepts nor rejects the critic's recommendation. Two interpretations are applicable to this end. First of all, the writer is so confident that she does not yield to the demands of the critic. The self-assertive tone is manifest not only within the poem, but also in Finch's consistent attitude towards fable writing. Secondly, as Messenger also notes, this ambiguous ending "stands as a warning that the fables are indeed to be highly satiric, as this one certainly is" (31). Obviously, Finch does not adopt satire as a form but rather employs it in her poetic works, particularly in her fables. Her satirical commentaries in regard to the position of writers and the restrictive literary tradition are clearly observed in this poem. The depreciative tone at the beginning leaves its place to an implicit assertive tone at the end.

"Mercury and the Elephant," the prefatory fable of the miscellany is an imitation of La Fontaine's "L'Elephant et le Singe de Jupiter" which is translated as "The Elephant and Jupiter's Monkey." In the original text, an elephant and a rhinoceros resolve to have a fight to settle a subject. Then Jove's monkey appears. The potentate informs the monkey that a big combat will occur that week. Negligent and surprised, the monkey asks who will fight. The elephant is astonished by his ignorance as it has thought that this divine embassy has arrived to support him. However, it turns out that Jove's monkey has arrived only to "part a blade of grass / Between some ants. . ." (36-7). The moral of the fable is that gods treat humans equally without favouring any kind. In Finch's "Mercury and the Elephant" the aftermath of a battle is described. Travelling around the woods, Mercury comes across an elephant which begins to tell its victorious defeat of a "wild Boar of a monstrous Size" (10). The elephant states that it does not pay heed to twenty thousand scandals about this battle as its only concern is what the gods think about it. Mercury's answer is quite ironic: "Then have you Fought!" (26). Clearly, gods are not even aware of this battle. Mercury's answer suggests how trivial their concerns are. Finch's fable continues with her own moral and justification of her choice. As being the prefatory fable, it explains the writer's statement of intention. In Finch's case, this statement takes the form of "bitterness at the lot of the woman writer" (Messenger 31). Being aware of the possible attacks which she might receive due to her

gender, Finch expresses her concern in a depreciative tone: “Solicitous thus shou’d I be / For what’s said of my Verse and Me;” (27-28). In this fable, according to Backscheider, “[t]here is a combination of modesty, astute analysis, understanding of poetic conventions, and frank self-assertion in her portrayal of writing, the literary landscape, and herself as a writer” (59). Like some of her female contemporaries she does not apologise for her preoccupation with writing but rather draws attention to the discriminatory critical judgements:

> Or shou’d my Friends Excuses frame,
> And beg the Criticks not to blame
> (Since from a Female Hand it came)
> Defects in Judgment, or in Wit;
> They’d but reply --Then has she Writ! (29-33)

Clearly, Finch criticises the position of the female writers who are made to apologise for their writing. The moral continues with a seemingly self-blaming assertion. According to Finch, all these concerns about what to write and how it is going to be perceived are no less trivial than the battle between the boar and the elephant in the eyes of gods. As can be clearly observed in the last stanza of the quotation, critics would respond to the female writer as “Then has she Writ!” (33), in the same manner Mercury responds to the elephant: “Then have you Fought!” (26). In this sense, the elephant represents the female writer who is seeking recognition and Mercury represents the critics of the period or the literary tradition in general. The elephant’s expectation of praise fails similar to the female writer’s desire for recognition. As Seber notes, “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” (183). In addition to this, to Finch, desire for fame and modelling her style according to the taste of those who will praise her are futile endeavours. The following lines are addressed to the female writers in order to point out that what they write only matters to themselves:

> Our Vanity we more betray,
> In asking what the World will say,
> Than if, in trivial Things like these,
> We wait on the Event with ease;
> Nor make long *Prefaces,* to show
> 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.* (34-44)

According to Finch, the Salic law of wit can only be subdued with a strong solidarity and perseverance. On the other hand, she establishes her own fame as a representative of female solidarity by seemingly addressing women with the pronoun "we." As implied, she will not act according to the demands of the critics and will not yield to criticisms that will be directed to her solely because of her gender.

A similar attitude towards criticism and faultfinding is also observed in "The Miller, His Son, and their Ass." Before starting to narrate the story, Finch does not neglect giving tribute to the fable genre as a classical form: "Tho' to Antiquity the Praise we yield / Of pleasing Arts; and *Fable's* earli'st Field / Own to be fruitful *Greece;* yet not so clean/ Those Ears were reap'd, but still there's some to glean;" (1-4). In this manner, Finch places herself within the tradition as an heir of her male classical predecessors; therefore, she disrupts the literary father-son relationship. Adapted from La Fontaine's "Le Meunier, son Fils et L'âne," the plot is quite familiar. A miller and his son decide to sell their donkey and set off for the fair. They tie the donkey from its feet and heave it up to carry so that it will not look exhausted at the fair. Seeing this scene, the passing people mock them. They, then, lower the beast and untie its feet, and the miller sets his son upon its back. This time, the people blame the son for making his old father walk while he is riding the donkey so, the son gets off and the miller rides the donkey. However, the son gets tired and the miller cannot feel comfortable under these circumstances and eventually takes his son beside him. This time, people begin to make comments and blame them for mercilessness. At the end, they resolve to descend and walk separately behind the donkey. The moral of the fable is that ". . . a Censure waits each state of Life" (101); therefore, one should not focus on what others will think about them. In her adaptation, Finch does not change the events, the characters, the moral or the title. However, she identifies the gender of the donkey as female which is described by masculine pronouns in the original text. This is an attempt to give at least a symbolic place to woman within the text. However, most significantly, it has a critical edge. The female donkey does not even play a role in the decision-making process. She

is represented as a silent object which carries out what is assigned to her. In this regard, the female donkey may represent the silenced women in the society and in texts.

Finch also criticises marriage practices and power relations in marriages as in "The Owl Describing her Young Ones." Derived from La Fontaine's "L'Aigle et le Hibou," the fable is regarded as an allegorical description of the marriage practices in seventeenth-century England (Backscheider 49). The fable tells the story of a mother owl which makes a contract with the eagle, to protect her little female owlets. According to the contract, the eagle will not eat the owlets, and the owl will guard the eagle from the dangers of the night. The mother owl begins to describe her owlets in the manner of a tradesman praising his goods:

> In Looks my Young do all excel,
> Nor Nightingales can sing so well.
>
> You'd joy to see the pretty Souls,
> With waddling Steps and frowzy Poles,
> Come creeping from their secret Holes.
>
> But I Ne'er let them take the Air,
> The Fortune-Hunters do so stare;
> And Heiresses indeed they are.
>
> This ancient Yew three hundred Years,
> Has been possess'd by Lineal Heirs:
> The Males extinct, now All is Theirs.
>
> I hope I've done their Beauties right,
> Whose eyes outshine the Stars by Night;
> Their Muffs and Tippets too are White. (11-24)

For the mother owl, the beauties of her owlets lie in their genes, so she is "like the parents marketing their daughters" (Backscheider 49). In La Fontaine's version, the wealth of the owlets is not mentioned. With this supplementation, Finch draws attention to the marriages of convenience in her time in which the females are almost commodified. Besides, despite being misleading, mother owl's description of her owlets is quite matronly as she cannot attribute any defect to her daughters. However, it is suggested both at the beginning and at the end of the fable that this deceptive description will prepare their end. When the mother owl comes back to the nest, she is

horrified by the scene. The eagle has already attacked her owlets and he justifies his behaviour by blaming the mother owl for her misleading description:

> I thought some *Phoenix* was their Sire,
> Who did those charming Looks inspire,
> That you'd prepar'd me to admire.
>
> Upon your self the Blame be Laid;
> My Talons you've to Blood betray'd,
> And ly'd in every Word you said. (70-75)

The tragic end of the owlets is a satirical commentary on power relations. From the very beginning the contract is not right as the parties are not equal. In order to protect her owlets, the mother owl makes a contract with the eagle and thus accepts his superiority, which is the major mistake she makes. Therefore, it is obvious that an infringement is going to happen. The maternal instincts of the owl urge her to glorify her owlets so when the eagle notices that the owlets are not as pretty as the mother describes them, he still does not abstain from attacking them. In any case, the agreement would not last long. The eagle attacks the owlets because he is hungry; therefore, he will justify his attack in every possible way. For one thing he would suggest it is due to the mother's sharpening his appetite and for the other because she lied to him. In either case, the eagle will have a justifying statement. Therefore, as there will always be a defence in the lot of the eagle which represents patriarchy, the owl is faulty from the very beginning for making such a contract. In this sense, yielding to the patriarchal hierarchy will result in losses in the lot of women, particularly in marriage.

On the other hand, in this fable, according to Backsheider, "Finch dramatizes the inordinate praise and misrepresentation of progeny, as well as the rapacious assumption of class privilege common in her society" (50). Mother owl's exaggeration marks the pretentiousness and artificiality of people. Backscheider's argument is also applicable to the literary culture. In fact, the moral of the fable is a kind of warning to the writers who exaggerate their works: "*Faces or Books, beyond their Worth extoll'd, /Are censur'd most, and thus to pieces pull'd*." (76-77). Clearly, what is glorified more than it deserves is doomed to perish. Moreover, the moral seems to address particularly the female writers. In the context of power relations in literary tradition, the mother owl represents the female writer who exaggerates her works. In this respect, the eagle

represents the critics who are ready to attack the works of the female writers. The foreshadowing at the beginning of the fable also supports this argument: "Why was that baleful Creature made, / Which seeks our Quiet to invade, / And screams ill Omens through the Shade?" (1-3). Considering the fact that Finch frequently employs the metaphor of shade in order to refer to female poetic realm, the wandering of the eagle, "the baleful Creature," through the shade can be regarded as a patriarchal threat to this realm. Therefore, being aware of the cynical attitude of the critics of the period towards female writers, Finch recommends them to be modest in order to avoid undesired consequences.

Finch's criticism of power relations in marriage is also observed in "The Prevalence of Custom." Adapted from La Fontaine's "L'ivgrone et sa Femme," the fable depicts the hopeless picture of a desperate marriage. Although the fable does not include inanimate objects or animals as characters, it is classified as fable due to its preoccupation with human weakness and folly as well as conveying a moral. The wife who is weary of her husband's inebriety plots to break his habit:

> A Female, to a Drunkard marry'd,
> When all her other Arts miscarry'd,
> Had yet one Stratagem to prove him,
> And from good Fellowship remove him;
> Finding him overcome with Tipple,
> And weak, as Infant at the Nipple,
> She to a Vault transports the Lumber,
> And there expects his breaking Slumber. (1-8)

From the very beginning the descriptions attract attention. The drunken husband is resembled to a "Lumber." The statements that describe the situation of the husband emphasise his weakness. Although a husband is considered the head of the household, particularly in the seventeenth-century England, the husband in the fable is as vulnerable and as weak as an "Infant at the Nipple" (6). The simile also evokes common female experiences; therefore, the gender of the narrator is manifested in the tone. Finch does not represent the wife as a submissive desperate housewife, on the contrary, she is witty and cunning although "all her other Arts miscarry'd" (2). The wife is resolved to play a trick on her husband by making him believe that he is in hell. She takes him to a dark vault, prepares a table "with [m]eat provided" (9), wears black and

stands beside the table. As soon as the husband wakes, he asks who this phantom is and where he is. The wife's response is highly humorous and witty:

> Mortal, quoth she, (to Darkness hurry'd)
> Know, that thou art both Dead and Bury'd;
> Convey'd, last Night, from noisie Tavern,
> To this thy still, and dreary Cavern. (19-22)

By representing the wife as a dominant figure and the husband as weak, Finch subverts the patriarchal power relations, particularly in marriage. The alterations that she makes in the original text also signify this concern. La Fontaine's original text primarily focuses on the vice of man. In Finch's version, the dialogues are extended and the focus is on the wife's craftiness. In a sense, she balances the unequally distributed roles by putting her female character to the centre of her narrative. La Fontaine ends the fable with the husband's asking for another drink. In Finch's version, the husband wakes and asks for another drink to which the wife responds as follows:

> A Bumper fetch: Quoth she, a Halter,
> Since nothing less thy Tone can alter,
> Or break this Habit thou'st been getting,
> To keep thy Throat in constant wetting. (41-44)

Unlike La Fontaine's version, in Finch's the wife has the final say. Finch represents the wife almost as a virago who threatens her husband with haltering. The supposed female passive obedience in the domestic sphere is reversed by the portrayals of a miserable and helpless husband and a witty and cunning wife. Although the "custom" prevails in the end, it is still the wife who has the last word.

"The Lyon and the Gnat," adapted from La Fontaine's "Le Lion et le Moucheron," and/or[viii] L'Estrange's "A Gnat Challenges a Lion," also exemplifies Finch's disruption of patriarchal power relations (Hinnant 184). The fable begins with the description of the lion as a confident and arrogant figure. Away from any danger, the lion enjoys his time while thinking about how powerful he is:

> To Rest he there himself compos'd,
> And in his Mind revolv'd,
> How Great a Person it enclose'd,
> How free from Danger he repos'd,
> Though now in Ease dissolv'd!

Who Guard, nor Centinel did need,
  Despising as a Jest
All whom the Forest else did feed,
As Creatures of an abject Breed,
  Who durst not him molest. (6-15)

His idyllic ease is interrupted by a sound in the air. It later turns out that this little creature that does not seem to be afraid of his magnificence is a gnat. Significantly, in both La Fontaine's and L'Estrange's versions, the gnat is male while Finch identifies its gender as female. The irritated lion threatens the gnat to death if it comes again:

Transported with th' Affront and Pain,
  He terribly exclaims,
Protesting, if it comes again,
Its guilty Blood the Grass shall stain.
  And to surprize it aims. (26-30)

It is ironic that such an ostentatious creature as the lion quarrels with a little and weak creature as the gnat. The representations of both animals are exaggerated; the lion is quite powerful and brave with his arrogant attitude, while the gnat is only "[a] creature, slight of Wing" (22). The gnat does not pay attention to the lion's threatening attitude; furthermore, she continues to tease him even more:

Upon his haughty Neck she rides,
  Then on his lashing Tail;
(Which need not now provoke his Sides)
Where she her slender Weapon guides,
  And makes all Patience fail. (41-45)

In the end, the proud and arrogant lion accepts the superiority of the gnat: "A Truce at length he must propose, / The Terms to be her Own;" (46-47). In La Fontaine's and L'Estrange's versions, the triumph of the gnat does not last long as it falls prey to a spider. In Finch's version, the female gnat triumphs over the male lion. Thus, Finch challenges and disrupts the gender stereotyping that privileges masculine power over feminine weakness. The seemingly invincible proud lion represents the patriarchy, which is torn down by a little gnat which represents women. Finch's representation of the gnat also illustrates her concept of womanhood. The gnat is not scared of the lion nor does she yield to its power. Confidence and modesty are the traits that Finch expects women to have. After the triumph, the gnat does not demand absolute power over the

lion but humbly suggests equal shares for each kind: "Who likewise Rest and Quiet chose, / Contended now her Life to close, / When she'd such Triumph known" (48-50). Although the gnat does not seem as magnificent as the lion, she is clever enough to know her own strength and the lion's weakness. The moral of the fable is in the form of a warning to men: "*You mighty Men, who meaner ones despise, / Learn from this fable to become more Wise; / You see the Lyon may be vext with Flies.*" (51-53). Therefore, the inaccuracy of the gender stereotyping is affirmed: neither the magnificent male lion is strong nor the little female gnat is weak. The commentary is also applicable to the case of the female writer. Although she is considered less witty than her male contemporaries and becomes the subject of ridicule, the female writer will be competent as long as she is constant and confident. By making alterations in the original text such as identifying the gender of the gnat as female, changing the end and appropriating the moral to her commentary, Finch challenges the gender stereotyping that dictates female weakness and subverts the patriarchal power relations.

In addition to her attempts at questioning gender stereotyping and subverting the patriarchal power relations by representing dominant female characters, Finch also presents a portrayal of the female writer as in "The Goute and the Spider." Titled as "La Goutte et L'araignée," the original text tells of the story of the gout and spider which choose their dwellings improperly. Seeing "the men called doctors creeping in and out" (186) the gout decides to reside in a poor man's house while the spider chooses a palace. However, neither can find peace in their places as the maid continually sweeps the spider's web and the gout is disturbed by "dig and hoe, / And rake and chop, and plough and mow," (186). In her version, as in most of her adaptations, Finch identifies the genders of her characters as female. However, in this particular fable, her aim is not to disrupt patriarchal power relations or to give a symbolic place to women. She presents the portrayal of the female writer and her position. In this fable, Backscheider notes, "the poet is figured in three ways: as the spider . . . as the good wife who alertly sweeps the cobwebs away and as the Ardelia of the final verse" (60).

It is significant that Finch refers to the spider as Arachne after the talented artist of the classical mythology (Erol 54). The metaphors of spinning and weaving are commonly employed for female artistic production. For instance, in *Odysseus*, Penelope uses her

craft in weaving to resist her suitors. Her weaving and reweaving is associated with artistic productivity and is regarded as a challenge to the patriarchal ideology (Clayton 19). From Ancient Greek anthropologist Papadopolou-Belmehdi's analysis onwards, Penelope's weaving is reinterpreted from different perspectives. Critics have found a metaphorical meaning in her act of weaving. According to Çelebi, weaving "projects her [Penelope] forward in the public space, the space of actions, of heroes, of men" (20-21). Similarly, the myth of Arachne is also associated with female artistic production. According to Bloomberg, "[h]er [Arachne's] skill in weaving tapestries is also symbolic of her skill in weaving stories" (2). In this sense, Finch's reference to the spider in her fable as "Arachne" has a symbolic significance. The spider in the fable represents the female artist who, despite discouragements, makes great effort to become a creative agent and to be recognised. However, her great effort is disrupted by the maid who constantly sweeps the spider's web away. In this context, the palace represents the poetic tradition while the maid is a critic who constantly attacks the female writer. According to Backscheider, ". . . the virago with the broom reprimands the artistic ambition" (60). It is also significant that the maid is female; therefore, Finch draws attention to the fact that female writers were not only attacked by their male contemporaries, but also by their fellow female poets. The persistence of the spider in weaving her web despite the disruption of the maid echoes the unrecognised female writer's perseverance despite the discouragements:

> Whilst with extended Broom th'unpittying Maid
> Does the transparent Laberynth invade
> Back stroke and fore the battering Engin went
> Broke euery Cord and quite unhing'd the Tent
> No truce the tall Virago e're admitts
> Contracted and abash'd Arachne' sitts
> Then in conuenient Time the Work renews
> The battering Ram again the work persues. (29-36)

On the other hand, Finch adds her satirical commentaries to the tale by making the gout find peace in a priest's body after the exchange:

> What's to be done? The Gout and Spider meet,
> Exchange, the Cottage this; That takes the feet
> Of the rich Abbott who that Pallace kept
> And 'till that time in Velvet Curtains slept

Now Colwort leaues and Cataplasms (thô vain)
Are hourly order'd by that griping traine.
Who blush not to Prescribe t'exhaust our Gold
For aches which incurable they hold
Whil'st stroak'd and fixt the pamper'd Gout remains
And in an easy Chair euer the Preist detains. (37-46)

While the fact that the gout finds peace in a priest's body can be regarded as a social satire, the fact that the spider finds peace in a poor man's house can be interpreted as the modest female writer's finding peace in her constrained poetic territory despite remaining unrecognised.

When compared to the original text, Finch extends the fable with twelve autobiographical lines. After the moral of the fable "From whose succeeding may this moral grow /That each his propper Station learn to know" (49-50), Finch adds personal details by addressing her husband as a dutiful, caring wife. Finch gets involved in the text through her address to Heneage Finch who lately suffered from gout:

For You my Dear whom late that pain did seize,
Not rich enough to sooth the bad disease
By large expences to engage his stay
Nor yett so poor to fright the Gout away
May you but some unfrequent Visits find
To prove you patient, your Ardelia kind
Who by a tender and officious care
Will ease that Grief or her proportion bear
Since Heaven does in the Nuptial state admitt
Such cares but new endearments to begett
And to allay the hard fatigues of life
Gaue the first Maid a Husband, Him a Wife. (51-62)

The glimpses of her domestic happiness are reflected at the end. According to Erol, Finch relates the moral of the fable with her personal commentary on the ground that as a caring wife, she knows her "propper Station" (50). Besides, Finch presents herself in the text as Ardelia, her poetic persona. It is significant that, by doing so she asserts her poetic identity as a female writer.

Although, traditionally in the world of fables, the lions and eagles frequently dominate, in Finch's representational world the power of expression is equally distributed among the species. In addition, the lesser inhabitants of her world such as flies, rats, weazles, cats and pigs are more in number than the other, stronger beasts. According to Staves,

"[a]t the heart of Finch's fables is a double consciousness, a simultaneous awareness of the perspectives of the great and of the lowly" (296). In line with this, her characters usually desire to be heard and seen. Although the lesser creatures are ignored and sometimes defeated, they still make themselves heard. Staves further argues that "Finch's desire to write and to have her words admired, even to have them sting, seems to fuel the urgency many of her lowly creatures feel to speak and to be seen" (297). "The Lord and the Bramble" exemplifies this desire with the bramble's disruption of the order of linguistic expression dominated by the lord. Yearning to speak but deprived of the ability to move, the bramble desires to rebel against the gardener's decision of uprooting it upon the lord's order:

> To view his stately Walks and Groves,
> A Man of Pow'r and Place
> Was hast'ning on; but as he roves,
> His Foe the slighted *Bramble* proves,
> And stops his eager Pace.
>
> That Shrub was qualif'd to Bite;
> And now there went a Tale,
> That this injurious partial Wight
> Had bid his Gard'ner rid it quite,
> And throw it o'er the Pail. (1-10)

Although it is possible to interpret the fable within the context of political upheavals of the time, the metaphor of groves that symbolise poetry offers an interpretation based on Finch's concerns about the secondary position of the female writer in the tradition. Considering Finch's marginalised position as a female Nonjuror, the bramble is likely to represent the female writer as well as a Stuart sympathiser. In fact, the fable can be regarded as an allegory of the female wit, who wishes to be heard. In this respect, the bramble represents the female writer who demands literary recognition, but is excluded from the tradition.

The expressions that describe the bramble emphasise its weakness: "But from the Abject and the Weak, / Who no important figure make," (13-14). The bramble refers to itself as "abject" and "weak" to create an irony. The adjectives that bramble uses for itself are the attributions of womanhood in seventeenth-century ideal. However, although the bramble seems weak in appearance, it is represented as a strong figure.

When it begins to speak, the bramble rebels against the decision of its displacement: "Must none but buffle-headed Trees / Within your Ground be seen?" (21-22). It attacks the lord for being intolerant of diversity. The bramble, in this sense, resembles the female writer in the literary tradition. Similar to the critic's recommendation of satire in order to establish a standard for the writers in "The Critick and the Writer of Fables," the lord in this fable desires a garden which is shaped according to his visual pleasure. The self-assertive tone that the bramble adopts suggests that it will persist on watching for opportunities to raise its voice:

> As to Yourself, who 'gainst me fret,
> E'en give this Project o'er:
> For know, where'er my Root is set,
> These rambling Twigs will Passage get,
> And vex you more and more. (31-35)

The moral of the fable is a direct challenge to the oppressors:

> *No Wants, no Threatinings, nor the Jail*
> *Will curb an angry Wit:*
> *Then think not to chastise, or rail;*
> *Appease the Man, if you'd prevail,*
> *Who some sharp Satire writ.* (36-40)

The fable sheds light on the possibilities a writing woman has in order to do something from a politically disadvantaged position. In this particular fable, the concepts of femininity and political displacement are allegorically embodied in the character of the bramble which wishes to raise its voice like many disenfranchised writers in the post-Revolution English society. Significantly, Finch's marginality as a royalist enables her to be accommodated in the literary tradition that is dominated by such well-known writers of the period as John Dryden, Roger L'Estrange and Alexander Pope. Additionally, as argued in the introductory chapter of this study, Finch's royalist sympathies in her writing enable her to assert a politic and poetic authority. In this sense, it is possible to say that the "angry wit" refers both to the female writer in the tradition and to the Jacobite sympathiser under the Williamite government, in Finch's case particularly; it becomes an embodiment of both.

Despite her self-depreciating tone in some of her poetic works, Finch's self-assertive voice is commonly heard even in her most modest statements. In most of her poetic

works, she reflects her contentment with a small audience. However, she also implies that as an established writer she does not need fame. “The House of Socrates,” an adaptation of La Fontaine’s “Parole de Socrate,” which is translated as “The Saying of Socrates” illustrates how Finch asserts her poetic identity as a female writer addressing only a small circle of friends. In Thombury’s translation of La Fontaine, Socrates builds a house for himself which becomes the subject of criticisms due to its smallness. At the end, Socrates states that it is intended only for true friends and that is why it is not as big as expected by such a prominent figure. The moral is that the notion of friendship does not refer to any acquaintance between two people. Although the concept of friendship is common, it is rare to find a true friend. In Finch’s version, the emphasis on Socrates’s respond in the title is diverted to the house which represents the poetic territory of the female writer. The house is not built by Socrates but is built for him. As in the original text, the house is not considered suitable “To One, so much Admir’d” (10). The moral of the fable draws attention to the house itself:

> But this for faithful Friends, and kind,
> Was only meant by me;
> Who fear that what too streight you find,
> Must yet contracted be. (17-20)

Socrates is contended with the small house which will be filled with true friends like Finch who is contended with the small audience whom she addresses. In this sense, Finch appropriates the moral of the fable to her own condition as a female writer through the metaphor of the house. The small house that will be inhabited by small number of friends represents Finch’s poetic realm which will inhabited by a small number of audience as manifested in the last two lines.

Clearly, Finch strategically made use of the conventions that the fable genre offers. The anonymity of the genre served her purposes as it enabled her to express her concerns on political and gender issues in the guise of a translator. Due to the flexibility of fable, she felt free in choosing her texts that she could mould to her own concerns. As a pioneer of La Fontaine style fable writing in Britain, she contributed to the development of the English fable by adapting the tales to the English social and political life. However, and most significantly, she draws attention to the position of women and female writers through the alterations that she makes in the original texts. She brings female point of

view to the tales by identifying her characters as females. Besides, she interprets the morals of the fables in accordance with her concerns as a female writer with high sensibility of the secondary position of women in life and art. The world of fables offers a suitable environment for her discussions as she can hold the power of representing her characters in accordance with her purpose. Another significant point is that fable writing was not common among female writers in the period she wrote fables. By being involved in fable writing, Finch disrupted the male dominance in the tradition; furthermore, she became one of the pioneers of this tradition as a prominent fabulist. Correspondingly, although fable is considered a minor genre, a genre of children's literature, Finch illustrates that a female writer can find freedom of expression in such genres.

# CHAPTER III

## SUCH AN INTRUDER IN GROVES: NATURE POEMS

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more

--Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Finch also has a significant place in the literary tradition of the period due to her use of natural elements. In her pastorals, she goes beyond the traditional mode. For male writers, pastoral was an emblem of virtue which praises the innocence of country life in an idyllic setting, while for Finch it is a feminine space, an alternative poetic realm where the female poet can raise her voice and find artistic expression. Besides, in her nature poems, she ascribes new metaphorical meanings to the commonly employed nature images in order to criticise and challenge the secondary position of women in the poetic tradition. She commonly employs shade and bird images metaphorically in order to present a picture of being a female poet in a male-dominated literary tradition and to offer a female poetic realm. This chapter will focus on Finch's metaphorical use of natural elements in regard to her criticism of the position of women in society and the literary tradition.

The fact that Wordsworth praised Anne Finch's "The Spleen," "A Petition for an Absolute Retreat," and "A Nocturnal Reverie" as "of much superior merit" (228) brought about two significant issues as its consequence. On the one hand it contributed to the recuperation of Finch's fame which had already begun fading in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, it created a tendency to classify Finch as a pre-romantic. For instance, Edmund Gosse uttered his hesitance in regarding Finch either as "the last of old" or as "the first of the new romantic school" (35). Even Myra Reynolds, who contributed much to Finch's recognition in the twentieth century with her collection of Finch's literary works and its extensive introduction, believed that Finch "delicately foreshadowed tastes that ruled in the romanticism of a century later" (*The Learned Lady* 152). However, critics of Finch have made great effort to rescue her fame from being regarded as a Romantic, which would be a misleading assumption about the

classification of her works. According to McGovern, it is ironic to regard Finch as a nature poet because even her few poems that deal with external nature are more of the taste of her time than of the Romantic period (79). Similarly, Greer regards this tendency as "the progress of an error" (245) by stating that Wordsworth "was anxious to claim her, even at the cost of misinterpreting her" (248). On the other hand, Hinnant draws attention to the fact that examination of Finch's poetry with Romantic tendencies will result in neglecting the ideological assumptions of her work (136). Clearly, to include Finch's nature poetry in a specific literary tradition is both difficult and misleading. Although Finch enjoyed retirement in Eastwell and reflects her impressions of it in her poetic works sometimes in a meditative mood, it is clear that she does not employ nature as the central theme in her poetry. She rather makes use of nature by employing natural elements as metaphors in order to present her concerns about political and gender issues. Similarly, she also makes use of the pastoral genre in order to "articulate the plight of the female author, specifically finding contentment in rooting her poetry in the dark recesses of the shade" (Laudien 64). Significantly, Finch's particular concerns about female poetic realm and the definition of female poetic identity are best manifested in her nature poems. Before analysing Finch's use of natural elements in regard to her concerns about the position of the female poets in the poetic tradition, it will be helpful to mention the concept of external nature for the poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century is a transitional period in regard to the treatment of external nature. In poetry, although the pastoral continued to exist as a classical form, modified with new approaches, the external nature did not appeal much to the male poets of the period either as a theme or as a motif in the seventeenth century. In fact, this critical judgement is primarily based on the works of the most canonised poets of the time. Despite not being very popular, the employment of nature existed. However, from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards a shift in the use of nature emerged in parallel with the theme of retirement (Williams 3). The poets who became weary of the rushes of city life, which was full of political intrigues and religious controversies, began to celebrate country life in their poetry. Male poets also employed natural elements in their poetry in order to glorify the dignity of God. It was because, Williams asserts, "it implied either God was in nature, or that God was directly

responsible for nature" (603). However, nature generally played a minor role in their poetry as can be traced in their stylistic and figurative uses of it. In her analysis of the treatment of nature between the periods of Pope and Wordsworth, Reynolds regards nature for Augustans as "a storehouse of similitudes" (*The Treatment* 25). The poet could select "his similes from facts already canonized by long literary service, or from the obvious facts of the park or the town garden" [ix](*The Treatment* 25). Reynolds finds the descriptions "traditional and bookish" (*The Treatment* 23) and resembles their "similitudes" to "ready-made clothing" (*The Treatment* 24). This tendency to use stock type imagery, Mair argues, was a result of the desire for simplicity. The diction of Augustan poetry was shaped by this desire and as a result, "[p]oetry became reduced . . . to a formula" (74-75). As can be observed in the examples that Reynolds gives, with few exceptions, most of their poetry that employs nature lacks extensive descriptions and inventive metaphors. Besides, in their treatment of nature they usually present an idealised scene in order to praise the divine power and celebrate the idyllic life. For instance, as Reynolds observes, day-time sky is preferred to moonlight and twilight because "the conception of daylight as useful and safe was a part of classical good sense" (*The Treatment* 21). As Reynolds further argues, night "was thought of but to be feared for its brown horrors and melancholy shade" (*The Treatment* 20). In this sense, their poetry usually presents the lively images of nature such as spring and summer, blue skies and flowery valleys (*The Treatment* 21).

On the other hand, nature takes an important place in women's writing, particularly in the period during which Finch wrote. The theme of retirement is present in their poetry as in that of their male contemporaries. Most of the retirement poems which employ nature by female poets in this period are in the form of a modified pastoral form. Therefore, critics who analyse the use of external nature in women's writing in this period, namely Barash, Backscheider and Messenger, primarily focus on the use of pastoral form by the female poets. In fact, this critical judgement arises from the fact that pastoral production was largely dominated by female poets in this period. Many female poets, namely Jane Barker, Anne Killigrew, Aphra Behn, Katherine Philips, Anne Finch, Lady Mary Chudleigh (1656-1710) and Sarah Fyge Egerton (1668-1723) tried their hand in pastoral writing. In regard to the popularity of pastoral poetry among female poets, Backscheider maintains that pastoral was a suitable form for an oppressed

group; therefore, it was used by female poets "to express a very wide variety of subversive themes" (52). In this sense, thematically it enabled female poets to discuss the themes that would not be employed otherwise.

Basing her study on Royalist female poets' preoccupation with public affairs in order to assert female poetic identity, Barash asserts that in the late-seventeenth century poetry of such Royalist women as Jane Barker, Anne Killigrew, Aphra Behn, Katherine Philips and Anne Finch "landscape becomes a metaphor of political change that figures both the political outcast and the imagination as feminine" (*EWP* 6). For instance, as Barash argues, Jane Barker's pastorals are marked by "an ideal of pastoral innocence and virtue" which she believed that was lost after the Revolution of 1688 (207-208). In Killigrew's poetry, feminine virtue is associated with "retirement from worldly conflict and corruption" (Price 296). Similarly, in Philips's poetry, "women's community, political controversy, and symbolic violence are repeatedly recast as pastoral 'virtue' and 'innocence'" (Barash, *EWP* 57). However, the use of the pastoral form by female poets was not only because it enabled them to discuss public affairs in their poetry. As Laudien notes, the pastoral form also "allowed the female poet wide margins of poetic freedom and variation within which to experiment" (14). The poetic freedom that the pastoral offers enabled the female poets to "rewrite constructions of gender and sexuality" (15). With respect to the pastorals of Behn, Finch and Rowe, Laudien further argues that "[w]omen use the form of the pastoral for self-exploration, dramatization and expression" (2). Female poets employed and subverted the conventions of the form in order to challenge the gender constructions.

Similar to her female contemporaries, Finch also made use of the pastoral convention, in McGovern's words, in order to construct a "free space" (129). Approximately one hundred of her 233 poems are pastorals or include certain conventions of it (Laudien 75). McGovern articulates Finch's choice of pastoral poetry in regard to her sensibility of gender issues as follows:

> By situating herself within the conventions of pastoral poetry, Finch could usurp male poetic prerogative. In a number of her poems the stance of the pastoral poet provides her with a freedom from gender restrictions. In some of her pastorals she deconstructs gender and sexuality in order to re-create an ungendered space. (129)

In line with McGovern's argument, it is possible to observe the alterations that Finch makes in the conventions of the pastoral. Finch represents a pastoral world which is free from restrictive patriarchal norms. Nymphs and shepherdesses enjoy retirement in this free space. Significantly, Finch generally does not present a stable landscape in her pastorals. As Laudien observes, her pastoral space is marked by its fluidity, she "frequently summons up a landscape of weeping clouds and rivers" (24). The "fluidity" of nature is a significant feature of Finch's nature poems. Basing her analysis on Luce Irigaray's definition of "woman-thing" as "fluid," as "continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusible" (111), Salvaggio relates the nature imagery which is not static but living in Finch's poems with the post-structural configuration of woman as "indeterminate and therefore subversive of enclosed structures" (256). In this sense, the unstable landscape in Finch's poems signifies the undefined position of the female poet in the poetic tradition. As a "fluid" subject, the female poet cannot be defined and stereotyped. Therefore, the "fluidity" of the landscape in Finch's poetry marks the femininity of this free space. Most significantly, Finch makes use of the pastoral tradition in order to discuss the topics of love, marriage and passion. Furthermore, she reverses the roles of swain and nymph by giving the nymph a more active role as in "An Invitation to Dafnis."

Besides making alterations in the conventions of the pastoral, Finch also employs natural elements metaphorically. According to Mallinson, "[t]he fact that Anne Finch was a woman writer attempting to adapt her talents to a literary tradition from which women's voices were almost absent made her position as a writer in her time idiosyncratic" (39). The idiosyncrasy can be also traced in her stylistic employment of the natural elements in her poetry. She ascribes new meanings to the conventionally employed images. One of the most striking examples of it can be observed in her metaphorical use of shade imagery. As Quinsey notes, "[s]hades and windings are conventional tropes of pastoral poetry;" however, in Finch's poetry, "the pastoral retirement of 'shade' is given a subtly feminist twist" (69). The pastoral shade becomes the female poetic realm, a feminine space, where the female poet can raise her voice and enjoy freedom from the restrictions of the male poetic convention. According to Salvaggio, if the feminine associations of darkness and masculine associations of light constitute a structure in the progress of man, this structure has to be dismantled to

comprehend the process of woman (243). In this process, Finch prefers neither darkness nor light. She claims authority in an untouched, unknown shade. In addition to that, Finch does not avoid employing night-time images. As Reynolds asserts, the earliest representation of the beauty and spiritual power of the night appears in Finch's poetry (*The Treatment* 21). In a sense, by employing imagery of darkness and shade, Finch aims to play with the possibilities of the alternative realm for the female poet. It is significant that, the metaphor of shade is frequently accompanied by the theme of retirement. As the shade represents her poetic realm, her retirement to the shade indicates her rejection of the male poetic convention. In such poems, the motif of friendship is also frequently observed. Her female persona does not prefer solitude but rather invites her female friends or her husband so that they can enjoy that experience. She associates retirement with artistic production, which might be due to the fact that her retirement in Eastwell corresponds to her most prolific years in terms of artistic production. By inviting her friends, she calls on her literary sisters in order to motivate their artistic production. Finch also employs the metaphor of the bird for the female poet or builds an analogy between herself and the bird figure. Through the metaphor of the bird, Finch represents the position of the female poet in the poetic tradition. In order to support what has been so far discussed in this study, the poems that Finch ascribes metaphorical meanings to the natural elements will be the analysed in this chapter.

According to Keith, "[a]mong many women poets writing in the Restoration and the eighteenth century, Finch is one of the most dexterous in providing alternatives to Augustan modes of representation" ("The Poetics" 476), as in the case of the metaphor of shade. The shade is a commonly used imagery in the pastoral convention. As Quinsey asserts, "[s]hades and windings are conventional tropes of pastoral poetry, not only associated with idealised sylvan retirement but also linked with overtones of the nocturne" (69). However, In Finch's poetry, shade gains a metaphorical meaning and serves for two different purposes: firstly, it appears as the place that the poet takes refuge in order to retire from the political controversies of her time. Secondly, it represents an alternative poetic realm for the female poet. Salvaggio regards Finch's shade as a "feminine space" and relates her longing for shade to her sense of displacement as a female writer (247) as follows:

> . . . [S]hade was the absent space in which Finch, as a woman writer, was displaced. At the same time it was also the feminine space that she desired. In both of these functions, it became a configuration of absence that was somewhere between the light that men desired and the darkness that they feared. It was in this displaced area between lightness and darkness that Anne Finch's shade became the undoing of the dark-light duality through which Enlightenment men figured their pursuits . . . And what it produces is not the enlightened world of man, but a world of fusion and process that is, in the case of Finch, the identity and writing of a woman. (250)

In this respect, Finch offers the concept of shade as a solution to the position of the female poet in the male-dominated poetic tradition. In "The Introduction" Finch addresses her muse, which is no one but herself, and declares the shade as her poetic realm as follows: "For groves of Lawrell, thou wert never meant; / Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there content" (63-64). Finch acknowledges that the female voice is excluded from the "groves of Lawrell," which stands for the male-dominated poetic tradition. However, instead of resenting this situation, Finch offers the alternative of shade for the female poet where she can raise her voice without the constraints of the tradition. Moreover, she commands the shade to be dark enough. As Finch's fondness for shade suggests, her primary concern is to assert the female poetic identity within a tradition whose borders are drawn by her. In this sense, by commanding the shade to be dark enough, she draws a picture of her poetic realm. Furthermore, she subverts the association of light with masculinity and artistic production by suggesting that art can be produced in the dark and shade as well. The metaphor of shade is also significant for Finch's self-representation as an established poet.

Finch's rejection of the male-dominated poetic tradition is also observed in "On Myselfe." At the beginning of the poem, she expresses her gratitude for being "fram'd, but of the weaker kinde," (2). As Seber notes, Finch "sees it as a prestigious state" (187), because she regards it as the emancipation of her soul. She further suggests that her male contemporaries are not as free and original as her in their poetic styles: ". . . If allowed they be, / Freely and thankfully as much I tast," (6-7). By using the word "allow" Finch draws attention to the restrictive nature of the poetic tradition and commonly accepted rules of versification. As the poem proceeds, Finch's self-assertive tone is replaced by a modest one:

> If they're deny'd, I on my selfe can Liue,
> And slight those aids, unequal chance does give.
> When in the Sun, my wings can be display'd,
> And in retirement, I can bless the shade. (9-12)

Ironically, although Finch rejects the poetic convention of her male contemporaries, she represents herself as a modest poet who is content with what is left for her. Therefore, by masking her self-assertiveness with modesty, she blurs the boundaries between her exclusion from the tradition and her rejection of it. Her blurring the boundaries between exclusion and rejection is also observed in her choice of shade because "in the Sun, [her] wings can be display'd." By ascribing herself the attribute of a bird which traditionally symbolises the poet, she assigns herself poetic authority. However, she does not prefer sunlight because her wings will be displayed, which implies that she does not pursue fame like her male contemporaries. Therefore, although she adopts a modest tone and represents herself as a poet who is content with what is in hand, Finch clearly rejects the poetic tradition that seems to deny her. Furthermore, her choice of shade itself is a subversive challenge to that tradition. In this sense, her absence from the tradition is her own choice.

According to Finch, the shade is a feminine space which offers the female poet absolute freedom as reflected in "A Petition for an Absolute Retreat." Critics frequently resemble the poem to Andrew Marvell's (1621-1678) "The Garden" (Rogers 233, McGovern 84, Mallinson 63, Greer 245). At first glance, both poems seem to be, as Rogers aptly puts it, "a celebration of rational, virtuous retirement in nature" (233). However, Marvell's setting is a man-made garden. Reynolds reminds us that "[t]hroughout the classical age the most genuine interest in nature had to do with parks and gardens" (*The Treatment* 25). Before the eighteenth century, she argues, "the fundamental principal on which gardens were made was the display of art, *the triumphant human mastery over nature*" (Italics mine, *The Treatment* 183). In line with Reynolds's account, it can be observed that Marvell's retirement place differs from Finch's because it is a demonstration of human mastery over nature. Moreover, Marvell portrays this garden like the Garden of Eden with a lively green imagery: "No white nor red was ever seen/ So am'rous as this lovely green" (17-18). Similarly, in Finch's poem, colourful imagery is also employed and an idealised landscape is presented. However, the most striking difference between Finch's and Marvell's treatments of external nature is that Finch does not only discuss

the joys of retirement in a lively landscape but rather ascribes metaphorical meanings to the elements of nature. Therefore, to analyse the poem in the light of the principles of the established tradition will result in an underestimation of metaphorical meanings of it. Finch's setting is not man-made and more significantly all the colourful imagery is juxtaposed with the image of shade. The poem begins with the female poet-speaker's longing for a retreat in shade:

> Give me O indulgent Fate!
> Give me yet- before I Dye,
> A sweet, but absolute Retreat,
> 'Mongst Paths so lost, and Trees so high,
> That the World may ne'er invade,
> Through such Windings and such Shade,
> My unshaken Liberty. (1-7)

Unlike Marvell, Finch chooses untouched nature with lost paths and high trees as her retirement place. For the poet-speaker, shade is the place that "the World may ne'er invade" and where she enjoys absolute freedom which cannot be shaken. McGovern suggests that the poem "describes a real retreat that is truly a part of the natural world" (84). However, considering the meaning of shade for Finch, her longing for a feminine space rather than a retirement place will be observed. Significantly, she demands an "absolute retreat" which implies that "the desired retreat must be wholly insulated from the realm of power and violence" (Hinnant 145).

As the concepts of power and violence are associated with the world of men, Finch's longing for retreat is an escape from that world to an alternative one in shade where she is free from the restrictions of a patriarchal society. As Salvaggio asserts, Finch's retreat takes her away "from man's poetic voice, absolutely away from his world, and into another space that displays all the markings and configurations of woman" (249). Ironically, Finch fills this shade with lively colourful images of fruits to such an extent that the wild shady place at the beginning of the poem almost turns into the Garden of Eden. During her retreat, she demands only a "A Table spread without [her] Care" (23) which is covered with "Grapes, with Juice so crouded up" (38), "Figs (yet growing) candy'd o'er / By the Sun's attracting Pow'r" (40-41), "Cherries, with the downy Peach" (42). She adds, there should also be strawberries "Springing wheresoe'er [she] stray[s]" (45-46). It is significant that the table must be spread without her care, which

implies that she frees herself from the domestic duties. On the other hand, considering that fruits are the products of nature, Finch's demand seems to represent her desire for productivity, her longing for artistic production in this shade. As for garments, she wishes to wear clothes "not so Gay" (64) but "light, and fresh as *May*" (65). The simplicity is a common feature of typical retirement poetry. However, in Finch's case, such a demand for simplicity evokes her concept of modesty as a female poet. As she clarifies in "On Myselfe," Finch deliberately stays away from the poetic tradition of her time and takes refuge in shade, which is her feminine poetic realm. As for this poem, considering the colourful imagery as the feature of the male poetic tradition, by wishing her clothes not to be so colourful but light, she rejects that tradition and adapts herself to her shady realm. As the poem proceeds, the juxtaposition between shade and colours becomes more striking:

> Let me, when I must be fine,
> In such natural Colours shine;
> Wove, and painted by the Sun,
> Whose resplendent Rays to shun,
> When they too fiercely beat,
> Let me find some close Retreat,
> Where they have no passage made,
> Thro' those Windings, and that Shade. (96-103)

Clearly, Finch's shady realm is not a dark place as she fills it with the colours of nature and makes it her own. According to Salvaggio, "Such notions of excess, figured in these descriptions of Edenic fruit and woven colours, seem to reflect a desire to transgress and blur fixed boundaries—a desire that Enlightenment men found both fascinating and threatening, and that they continually associated with woman" (248-49). By juxtaposing colours with darkness, Finch subverts the dark-light dichotomy and creates an alternative feminine space, which seems shady but can be filled with real colours of nature. In her descriptions, the naturalness of the scenery is notable. She does not represent nature like a painting that her male contemporaries do with stock type imagery. The nature Finch presents is a "fluid" place where ". . . some River slides away, / To increase the boundless Sea" (130-31). Similar to the female poet, all the elements of nature, like the "boundless Sea," are freed from the restrictive representations of male poetic imagination.

In regard to Finch's attempts to challenge the patriarchal assumptions about the female voice, the metaphor of the cave becomes crucial. Salvaggio relates the suppression of female voices with entrapment in cave-like places. For instance, Orpheus leaves Eurydice in the caves of the underworld while he himself goes back to the world of light. Similarly, Echo is imprisoned in caves (259-260). As Salvaggio further articulates, in the gothic novels of the eighteenth-century by female writers, "women encounter the horrors of their own sexuality by being sequestered in dark interior spaces, secret chambers, dungeons, locked staircases, and attics" (260). In line with Salvaggio's argument, the cave is the place where female voices are suppressed. However, Finch makes this fearful place a "wond'rous" cave where one can find peace. In "A Petition for an Absolute Retreat," Finch refers to the story of Marcus Licinius Crassus (c. 115 BC- 53 BC), a Roman general and politician who once escaped from the rage of Marius and hid himself in a cave. After a period of time, he disclosed himself, got involved in wars and was later killed in a war. According to Finch, Crassus should have stayed in the cave, where he could find peace in retirement:

> Had He still continu'd there,
> Made that lonely wond'rous Cave
> Both his place and his Grave;
> Peace and Rest he might have found,
> (Peace and rest are under Ground) (229-33)

As stated, for Finch, the cave is a safe, "wond'rous" place, like shade, a feminine sphere, which is away from the rush of life, the world of men. Clearly, Finch's fondness for dim-lit places is not limited to her choice of shade as the feminine poetic retreat. As a marginalised female poet, she prefers unpopular areas for her artistic production. If the shade filled with colours of nature is macrocosmic representation of Finch's poetic realm, the cave is the microcosmic representation of it. She disrupts the association of the cave imagery with entrapment and reconstructs a feminine space where female voices can be raised. Although the imagery of cave brings darkness into mind, Finch again fills this place with lively images of light and "Rising Springs" (222). Therefore, Finch employs the images of shade and cave differently in order to offer an alternative poetic realm for the female poet. This realm is away from the restrictions of the patriarchal domain and its representations of nature, woman and the female poet.

Another significant feature in Finch's nature poems is the image of the tree. According to Hamrick, "Finch's trees invoke the Virgilian pastoral tradition and its attendant themes of exile and leisured retirement, but often they work allegorically as specifically Jacobite images" (541). Political implication is a common feature of most of Finch's poetic works. Therefore, Finch's use employment of the tree metaphor is quite suggestive. In regard to her position as a Nonjuror, trees symbolise the refuge that she takes for protection from the political controversies of her time. Quinsey suggests that "'Shade' in this period is primarily a synecdoche for trees" (69). In this context, trees, which provide shade, become the essential components of Finch's alternative realm. In her poem "The Tree," Finch seems to celebrate the retirement in nature. Accordingly, her longing for shade is observed in her address to the tree: "Fair Tree! For thy delightful Shade/ 'Tis just that some return be made;" (1-2). The theme of retirement in Finch's poetry can also be associated with her longing for freedom. As McGovern asserts, "the notion of freedom is always central to the desire for retreat" (148). In this regard, Finch's address to the tree marks her desire for liberty. For Finch, freedom can be achieved only in her own realm, where she can be free from patriarchal restrictions. It is also significant that she addresses a specific tree in her imagination. Although she does not identify its kind, Reynolds suggests that it might be an oak tree ("Introduction" cxxxiv). The oak tree, which is well known for its durability, generally stands for power, authority and fertility. In the poem, it symbolises artistic production. In this sense, Finch's longing for tree can be associated with her enthusiasm for poetic production. Her tree provides shelter to the birds and listens to their music. Considering the connotations of bird imagery, the singing birds refer to versifying poets in the poem. As the poem proceeds, the pastoral figures of shepherd and nymph appear, which urges the poet-speaker Finch to ask "Shall I then only silent be, / And no Return be made by me?" (15-16). As the setting becomes more appropriate for poetic production, Finch explicitly utters her desire for being heard as a female poet instead of remaining silent. In line with what is so far discussed, this particular tree represents Finch's longing for artistic production as a female poet.

Finch also employs the metaphor of bird in order to present the plight of the female poet in the tradition. As Mallinson argues, bird is an old imagery in English literature and its central images are "harbinger of spring, figure of the transience of life, embodiment of

freedom, symbol of the singer and poet" (70). In her poetry, Finch generally builds an analogy between the female poet and the bird figure and draws parallelisms between their shared experiences. Most striking example of it is observed in "The Bird and the Arras." Although the poem deals with the bitter struggle of an imprisoned bird, significant details come in view when it is interpreted in the light of Finch's main concern in her poems. The poem tells the story of a bird which is trapped in a room and unsuccessfully tries to get out of it. As Doody asserts, the poem is "a brilliant delineation of confusion and frustration" ("Women Poets" 222). The bird "takes a well wrought Arras for a shade" (2), however, it mistakes a picture for a real one and all its attempts to escape fail:

> How swift she turns but turns alas in vain
> That piece a Grove, this shews an ambient sky
> Where imitated Fowl their pinions ply
> Seeming to mount in flight and aiming still more high.
> All she outstrip's and with a moments pride
> Their understation silent does deride
> Till the dash'd Cealing strikes her to the ground
> No inrecepting shrub to break the fall is found
> Recovering breath the window next she gaines
> Nor fears a stop from the transparent Panes. (6-15)

According to Rogers, "[t]he bird imprisoned in man-made room suggests a woman imprisoned in man-made conventions" (236). Considering the long-standing association of the bird figure with the poet (Mallinson 70), Finch builds an analogy between the female poet and the bird figure and portrays "the plight of the woman poet entrapped within the restrictions of the poetic tradition" (Seber 192). The room in which it is trapped symbolises the poetic tradition from which the bird desires to escape. Therefore, Finch's rejection of the restrictive poetic tradition is evidently observed in this poem. Clearly, the bird is not happy in the "well wrought Arras" and wants to sing its cheerful tunes in a shade similar to Finch who feels herself free in her poetic realm. Significantly, like the female poet, the bird will not sink into learned helplessness and stop this bitter struggle. At the end of the poem, it is clarified that the story of the bird is an allegory of the plight of the female poet:

> But we degresse and leaue th' imprison'd wretch
> Now sinking low now on a loftyer stretch
> Flutt'ring in endless cercles of dismay

Till some kind hand directs the certain way
Which through the casement an escape affoards
And leads to ample space the only Heav'n of Birds. (16-21)

The fact that the poet speaker adopts the pronoun "we" suggests that this allegorical story is a commonly shared experience for all female poets. The bird's bitter struggle is ended by "some kind hand" and it leads to "ample space only Heav'n of Birds." It is significant that, as Seber argues, the bird does not fly to the groves which symbolises the poetic tradition, but to "ample space" which is considered more suitable for the female poet (192). However, this space is the heaven of birds, and the bird chooses to dwell in this place, which is its own realm where it feels free.

Similarly, in "To the Nightingale" Finch criticises the restrictive poetic tradition by building an analogy between the female poet and the nightingale. According to Keith, "[i]n many of her poems 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" ("The Poetics" 472). In this particular poem, Finch subverts the art and nature dualism in order to criticise the constraints that are imposed on poets. The poem begins with the poet's command to the nightingale to sing so that the poet can be inspired and write:

Exert thy Voice, sweet Harbinger of Spring!
  This moment is thy Time to sing,
  This Moment I attend to Praise,
And set my Numbers to thy Layes.
  Free as thine shall be my Song ;
  As thy Musick, short, or long.
Poets, wild as thee, were born,
  Pleasing best when unconfin'd,
  When to Please is least design'd, (1-9)

According to Finch, poetry can be produced only without constraints and without any expectation to please. Linker draws attention to the traditional nightingale poems before Finch and suggests that, they would "feature a contest between an artist figure and the nightingale, with the outcome traditionally resulting both in the triumph of the artist over the nightingale, or of art over nature, and in the nightingale's death" (166). However, as the poem proceeds, the poet and the muse cannot reach the nightingale's tunes, and the nightingale prevails because she is free of a restrictive tradition. The poet

cannot reach the nightingale's tunes as he is not as free as her and ultimately the poet's muse is defeated:

> Cares do still their Thoughts molest,
> And still th' unhappy Poet's Breast,
> *Like thine, when best he sings, is plac'd 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.
> 'Twill not be! Then change thy Note ;
> Let division shake thy Throat.
> Hark! Division now she tries;
> Yet as far the Muse outflies. (Italics mine, 11-25).

As the emphasis in the quotation implies, Finch regards pain as the essential component of good poetry. The poet can write his best verses only when he suffers, like the nightingale, which is "plac'd against a thorn." The example illustrates that hardships do not constitute impediment for Finch; on the contrary, they contribute to the success of the poem. It is significant that the poet is identified with the masculine pronoun "he" (13) while the nightingale is identified with the feminine pronoun "she" (14). The poet's attitude towards the nightingale is quite patronising from the beginning to the end. However, the nightingale continues her song without paying heed to the poet's commands. The nightingale represents the female poet, who will not yield to the oppressive poetic tradition and who will continue to sing her song as she wishes. At the end of the poem, the male poet speaker accepts his fault. Through the poet's commentary on their follies, Finch criticises the poets of her time who looked down on female poetic talent. The poet's identification as male becomes definite at the end, as he refers to himself as one of those who "have 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)

Besides ascribing metaphorical meanings to the elements of nature, Finch also makes nature her company in some of her poems. In these poems, she does not present an idealised nature and does not regard the darkness of night as a fearful concept. She rather presents nature with lively imagery, yet in darkness. The most striking example can be observed in "A Nocturnal Reverie." This particular poem has long urged the critics to regard Finch as a pre-Romantic. However, the primary concern of Finch in this poem is not to present nature in the manner of a Romantic poet. She rather aims to criticise the position of the female poet in the tradition and women in the society. The poem is about a woman's retirement in night-time. Finch portrays the harmony of woman and nature. The poem begins with the description of the setting:

> In such a Night, when every louder Wind
> Is to its distant Cavern safe confin'd;
> And only gentle Zephyr fans his Wings,
> And lonely *Philomel,* still walking, sings;
> Or from some Tree, fam'd for the Owl's delight,
> She, hollowing clear, directs the Wand'rer right:
> In such a Night, when *passing Clouds* give place,
> Or thinly vail the Heav'ns mysterious Face;
> When in some River, overhung with Green,
> *The Waving Moon* and *trembling Leaves* are seen; (Italics mine, 1-10)

The fluidity of the nature which is observed in descriptions of "The Waving Moon," "passing Clouds" and "trembling Leaves" suggests that this is a feminine space. However, the most striking reference for this assumption is "lonely Philomel" who walks and sings in this place. The tragic story of Philomela can be associated with the female poet's writing adventure.

According to the myth, Philomela is the sister of Procne who is married to Tereus of Thrace, the son of Ares who "proved to have inherited all his father's detestable qualities" (Hamilton 270). Upon Procne's plea, one day Tereus decides to bring Philomela from Athens. However, on their way to Thrace, Tereus betrays Philomela and takes advantage of her. When Philomela threatens to reveal what he has done Tereus rages and cuts Philomela's tongue; then leaves her in a guarded place and tells Procne that her sister has died on the journey. Now deprived of the ability to speak, Philomela decides to tell her story by weaving it on a tapestry. Philomela gives it to an old attendant so that she can transmit it to the Queen. When Procne receives the tapestry,

she reads the story in horror and plots against her husband. Procne kills her son and serves him as meal to her husband and then reveals the truth. While Procne and Philomela attempt to flee, Tereus catches up with them. Before he kills the sisters, gods turn them into birds: Procne to a nightingale and Philomela to swallow because "her tongue was cut out, only twitters and can never sing" (Hamilton 271).

Finch's reference to this tragic mythological figure is significant in many senses. Philomela, whose tongue is cut by a furious man, represents the female poet whose voice is suppressed in the male-dominated poetic tradition. Philomela's weaving also has a symbolic significance in regard to women's writing. Critics such as Salvaggio, Gilbert and Gubar and Nancy Miller relate the myth of Arachne's weaving with women's writing[x]. According to Miller, in order to recover women's writing, the story of Arachne has to be re-appropriated as the construction of "a new object of reading, women's writing" (qtd. in Salvaggio 245). Considering the association of female artistic production with weaving, the reference to Philomela offers a significant detail in regard to Finch's concerns about the female poetic production. Although Philomela's tongue is cut out by a furious man, she is still able to tell her story through art. Similar to Philomela, although the female poet is confined by patriarchal norms and conventions, she will create a language of her own and will tell her story. Although Philomela's tongue is cut in the myth, Finch gives voice to this silenced figure by making her sing in her dark feminine realm. Another significant detail about Philomela is that she is turned into a bird at the end. Philomela, in this respect, represents the female poet who sings in shades and finds peace in night-time.

As in the poems that the poet/speaker longs for the shade, in this poem too, the speaker is content with this dark but beautiful place. The poet speaker does not choose an idyllic rural setting for retirement, but rather finds peace in the darkness of night in "A Nocturnal Reverie." According to Mermin, "the poem reverses the conventional binary associating day with Phoebus, knowledge, reason, clear judgment, and order, and night with darkness, error, confusion, loss of distinction, and delusive fancy" (71). In line with Mermin's argument, it is possible to observe that Finch challenges to the light-dark dualism by presenting a lively night-time scenery. She fills this dark scenery with lively

images of nature and makes it a feminine space where women and animals can enjoy themselves without any threat:

> When freshn'd Grass now bears it self upright,
> And makes cool Banks to pleasing Rest invite,
> Whence springs the *Woodbind*, and the *Bramble*- Rose,
> And where the sleepy *Cowslip* shelter'd grows;
> Whilst now a paler Hue the *Foxglove* takes, (11-15)

By filling the darkness with lively images of nature, Finch "turns the pastoral *carpe diem* into a *carpe noctem*" (Miller 617) and creates a feminine space in which the female poet-speaker is in harmony with nature. Gerrard asserts, "the poem emphasizes the empathy between female speaker and beasts of burden allowed to wander freely at night" (65). However, this harmony between woman and nature can be sustained only during night-time "whilst Tyrant-*Man* do's sleep" (38). Doody suggests that the poem is a "quiet protest [of] – male civilization's brutal ownership of both woman and nature" ("Women Poets" 222). In this context, woman and nature are both the victims of the dominating and restrictive patriarchal system. For the speaker, the place is so complete that she desires to benefit from it as much as she can, until the day breaks:

> O'er all below a solemn Quiet grown,
> Joys in th' inferiour world, and thinks it like her Own:
> In such a *Night* let me abroad remain,
> Till Morning breaks, and all's confus'd again;
> Our Cares, our Toils, our Clamours are renew'd,
> Or Pleasures, seldom reach'd, again pursu'd. (45-50)

The breaking of the day suggests the renewal of patriarchal power over nature and women. In addition, the domestic duties of women start with the breaking of the day. Although the poet speaker bemoans the breaking of the day, it is suggested that this vicious circle will never end and therefore woman's harmony with nature will be restored, though in night-time.

As a female poet in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England, Finch was always aware of the restrictions imposed upon female poets by the poetic tradition, and on a larger scale, by the society. It is commonly argued that she struggled to accommodate herself within this tradition. However, Finch tended to establish her own

poetic realm, where the poet could enjoy the absolute freedom in the shade and where she could raise her voice freely like a nightingale. By ascribing new metaphorical meanings to commonly employed nature images, she draws the borders of this poetic realm. In order to establish this realm, she begins with subverting the basic dichotomy of the Enlightenment: light and dark. Despite being away from the brightness of daylight, Finch's poetic realm is set in the darkness and shade where she enjoys absolute freedom and engages with nature. Significantly, by employing the metaphor of shade for her poetic realm, she offers an alternative space for the female poet, which is neither dark nor light but dim-lit. This space is a feminine space, which the world cannot invade and which can be filled with colours and images in female literary imagination. Including her poems on the pleasures of retirement, Finch allows only her female friends to enjoy this beauty and freedom in the shade. In addition, in her poems, particularly those which are the focus of this chapter, she employs the metaphor of bird for the female poet. Through this metaphor, she criticises the position of the female poet in the poetic tradition and challenges this position. In the same vein, she reinterprets the image of nightingale. For her, the male poet and the female nightingale cannot compete because they do not speak the same language and because they do not share similar experiences. Her nightingale is free in the forests, like the female poet in the shade. She reveals her determination to cope with the difficulties as a female poet in the face of restrictions and criticisms. Most significantly, in all poems that are analysed in this chapter, denial of her acceptance into the poetic tradition turns into her rejection of the tradition. She makes use of the elements of male-dominated poetic tradition such as the pastoral shade and the nightingale in order to construct an alternative realm. In this sense, it will be misleading to classify Finch as a pre-romantic; she is rather a female poet who establishes a poetic realm out of what is left to her. By doing so, she somehow becomes "an intruder" in the groves of the poetic tradition.

## CONCLUSION

The period between late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was a transitional one; politically, socially, historically and culturally. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, wrote and published many poetic works in this transitional period. Although she was "noble both by birth and by marriage" (Woolf 64) and therefore belonged to a privileged class, she experienced certain difficulties that were entailed by her class. As a Stuart sympathiser, she was highly affected by the political upheavals of her time. Her husband Heneage Finch lost his position in the parliament and was arrested after the Glorious Revolution. They refused to take the oath of allegiance for the monarch of William and Mary, and as a result they kept moving from one friend's or relative's estate to another as refugees. In her poetic works, Finch frequently reflected her sympathies for the exiled Stuarts. In fact, it was a strategy that some other female poets of the time also followed. Writing for the Stuart monarch enabled Finch to claim poetic and political authority.

Although her political sensibility is frequently reflected in her poetic works, the major concern of Finch is to criticise the secondary position of women in her society, particularly in the poetic tradition. Finch is always concerned about the suppression of female voices in the tradition in which women can exist only as inspiring muses or as silent objects of male desire. The originality of Finch's poetry lies in her poetic style. She does not merely criticise the secondary position of women in life and art. She develops certain strategies in order to challenge the myths that are commonly employed by the male poets in their works. In her time, the use of mythological elements in poetry was considered an indicator of the poet's classical learning, which was essential for a respected poet. However, Finch makes use of mythological elements in order to revise the myths that exclude women from artistic production. She reinterprets the mythological stories and furthermore challenges the myths embedded in those stories. In these poems, Finch also ascribes new roles and identities to the characters in order to revise the secondary position of women and to challenge it. It is significant that, in her poetic works, Finch does not resent her exclusion from the poetic tradition due to her gender, but rather defines female poetic identity as an autonomy which has to be evaluated in a poetic tradition whose borders are not drawn by patriarchal norms.

Through her revisionist attempts, she illustrates that the female poet can raise her voice by dismantling the myths that deny her existence. Furthermore, she represents herself as an established poet, although sometimes she adopts a self-depreciative tone as a strategy.

Finch's contribution is not limited to her attempts to redefine the place of woman in poetry and to release woman from the roles assigned to her through myths. She also adapted and imitated fables of La Fontaine and contributed both to the popularisation of the form in her time and to the development of the English fable. Although her adaptations are generally analysed in regard to her political concerns, Finch reflects her sensibility in gender issues as well. She brings the female point of view to this literary form with the strategy of gender identification. She changes the genders of the characters in the original texts in order to give at least a symbolic place to women. The allegorical and representational world of fables offers Finch a realm where she can enjoy the freedom of inventive representation. Occasionally, she represents strong female characters and weak male characters in a humorous tone in order to challenge gender stereotyping. In addition, she changes the morals of the fables in accordance with her concerns. Most significantly, she illustrates that such "minor" forms as fable can be moulded for the purpose of the female poet.

Finch is also a prominent poet due to her treatment of external nature. Her use of external nature was praised by William Wordsworth. Moreover, she was also regarded as a nature poet and even as a pre-Romantic due to her style in these nature poems. However, in her nature poems, Finch does not aim to share her experiences in nature or reach to contemplation through the beauties of nature. She makes use of the elements of nature in order to redefine the position of the female poet in the poetic tradition. Furthermore, she challenges the association of artistic production with masculinity by establishing an alternative realm for the female poet. She subverts the dark-light dichotomy in order to challenge the idea of "Enlightenment." Finch is not against the spirit of Enlightenment, but is against its association with masculinity. Light represents knowledge and reason and ultimately the world of men. For this reason, she prefers to present nature in darkness and illustrates that darkness can be filled with lively images of the female poet's mind. She also ascribes metaphorical meanings to the pastoral

imagery of shade. She converts the pastoral shade into a feminine space, a female poetic realm where the female poet can raise her voice without any restrictions. By building an analogy between birds and the female poet, she discusses woman's place in the poetic tradition. In her nature poems, the birds are free only when they are in the shade or when they are not imprisoned. For Finch, the female poet can be free only when she breaks free of the restrictions of the poetic tradition. In this sense, she does not resent the exclusion of the female voices from the poetic tradition of her time, but rather appreciates this denial because, for her, it enables the female poet to express herself without the restrictions of tradition.

Although the poetic tradition of the time tended to suppress female voice, Finch was able to raise her voice with her inventive poetic strategies. She makes use of the conventions of the dominant literary tradition in order to establish a female poetic realm out of it. Discouragements are not impediments for her, they rather sharpen her creativity. Although a limited space is left for the female poet, she manages to turn this space into a glorious realm. In her poetry, muses sing without any need for invocation. Silenced Philomela can metaphorically sing in darkness. The birds enjoy their freedom in shades. The shades are filled with poetic colours and images. Darkness is illuminated. A female gnat defeats a male lion. Women speak more and even louder than men. Nonetheless, the "intruder[s] in the rights of men" freely sing their songs, like Finch.

# NOTES

[i] Finch did not regard her writing as satire. See "Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720): Sorrow into Song." *Women and Poetry 1660-1750.* p.63

[ii] Before this time, a few of her songs appeared in print, and her six religious poems were published in 1696.

[iii] The term was originally coined by Jürgen Habermas. See. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Trans.Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Massachutes: MIT Press, 1991.

[iv] See "A Short View of the Immorality, and the Profaneness of the English Stage together with the Sense of Antiquity upon this Argument." London: S. Keble, 1698. *Internet Archive.* Web. 12 Oct. 2017.

[v] The phrase is inspired by Audre Lorde's famous speech "The Master's Tools will never Dismantle the Master's House." See *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* New York: Ten Speed, 2007. p.104.

[vi] See "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." Signs 8.1 (1982): 68-90.

[vii] Throughout this study, the translation of La Fontaine by Walter Thornbury is going to be used as the primary source.

[viii] The inaccuracy arises from the fact that Finch does not state her source in some of her fables.

[ix] For examples see Reynolds *The Treatment* p. 23- 31

[x] A more detailed discussion of this association can be found in chapter two p. 72

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**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**
**İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA**

Tarih: 06/07/2018

Tez Başlığı : Erkek Sınırlarını İhlal Etmek: Anne Finch'in Manzum Eserleri

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**Öğrenci No:** N14221486
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**Programı:** İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans Programı

**DANIŞMAN ONAYI**

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**İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA**

Tarih: 06/07/2018

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