

## **ABSTRACT**

**Title of Dissertation:**

**LADIES OF THE SHADE: THE  
PASTORAL POETRY OF APHRA BEHN,  
ANNE FINCH, AND ELIZABETH  
SINGER ROWE**

**Heidi Laudien, Doctor of Philosophy, 2004**

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In the hands of women poets like Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Anne Finch (1661-1720), and Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737), the inherently imitative genre of the pastoral becomes quite interesting. The artificiality of the Golden Age and the stock dramatic action of one-dimensional nymphs and swains are enlivened and given depth as these women manipulate convention to produce a strikingly different kind of verse. Sexual and political authority appear to overlap in their poems and a host of subversive women's stories emerge, featuring powerful heroines equipped not only with sexual and political, but also authorial power. Their pastorals challenge the Puritan ideology of self-denial, the masculinization of desire, and the pervasive insistence on female chastity. Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe use the form of the pastoral for self-exploration, dramatization, and expression. Their pastorals offer a powerful revision of a masculine tradition in terms of constructing a space for the articulation of female desire, spirituality, and retirement, and also for their challenges to heteronormativity in the pastoral tradition and in culture at large. This fresh style explores female sexuality, relationships, politics, and social issues

from a personal and intimate perspective, and lends insight into the creative mind and life of the Restoration female poet.

Their uses of the pastoral undermine the genre's attempt to construct stable binary categories of oppositional difference. Their unique engagement with pastoral conventions and their emphasis and development of pastoral attributes reveal that such features are capable of fresh interpretation and application in the hands of women pastoralists. Their ability to redirect the pastoral tradition allows us as readers to understand their relationship to the male poetic tradition through their changes from their source. Thus their pastorals do not offer merely model countercultures that contest contemporary society, rather these poems consistently use the conventions of the pastoral to explore a female-specific space from which to characterize this particular poetic oeuvre as a whole. The pastoral creations of Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe foreground the woman writer as a unique challenge to masculine dominance in the field of female representation.

**LADIES OF THE SHADE: THE PASTORAL POETRY OF APHRA BEHN, ANNE  
FINCH, AND ELIZABETH SINGER ROWE**

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**Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2004**

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, father, and sister, Lori, whose continued support and encouragement made the completion of this project possible.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank my entire dissertation committee for their thoughtful insights and critique of my work. I would also like to thank Professors Paula McDowell, Sue Lanser, and Sharon Achinstein, who offered invaluable advice and critique in the early stages of the dissertation. Further thanks to the faculty of the Manhattan College English department for their daily encouragement and continued interest in my work, specifically Dean Mary Ann O'Donnell and Professors Ashley Cross, Mark Taylor, and June Dwyer. Most especially, I would like to thank my director, Professor Vincent Carretta, for his continued advice, critique, and support throughout this entire process.

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## INTRODUCTION

Visualize a green bower. Birds chirp, trees sway, a casual breeze is in the air; it is eternally spring. Within this space, a young, beautiful nymph, governed by chastity and innocence, frolics about, attempting to shun the advances of a persistent swain. As he thrusts forward, she retreats with coy gestures until all at once she can stand it no more. Overcome, she yields, and the two participate in innocent bliss.

From Theocritus and beyond, poets have replayed this pastoral scenario with little variation to comment on love, life, religion, sex, and politics. Yet in the hands of women poets, the inherently imitative genre of the pastoral becomes quite interesting. The artificiality of the Golden Age and the stock dramatic action of one-dimensional nymphs and swains are enlivened and given depth as female pastoralists manipulate and play with convention to produce a strikingly different kind of verse. Sexual and political authority appear to overlap in their poems and a host of subversive women's stories emerge, featuring powerful heroines equipped not only with sexual and political, but also authorial power.

Yet the bulk of collections and studies on the pastoral to date ignore women's contributions to the form. In fact, the *Penguin book of English Pastoral Verse* (1974) reaffirms pastoral as a male preserve in its absence of female pastoral poets, and even more contemporary investigations of the pastoral such as Paul Alpers's *What is Pastoral* (1996) fail to acknowledge the contributions of women. Furthermore, no study of the pastoral examines the work of women poets exclusively as pastoralists. To date, the most comprehensive treatment of women's pastorals is Ann Messenger's *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (2001), yet this work primarily recuperates



women poets with the intent of making pastoral more engaging.<sup>1</sup> While my work too is recuperative in nature, this study examines in depth three pastoral poets, Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Anne Finch (1661-1720), and Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737). My work makes connections among and between their pastorals in relation to the larger context of pastoral as a masculine tradition in order to suggest that these poets made credible contributions to the form that differ from those of their male contemporaries. I argue that specific points of departure in women's employment and creation of pastoral include their thematic range and variety, their complication of the pastoral narrative and its figures, and the frequency of pastoral conventions in their poetry.<sup>2</sup> I argue further that female uses of the pastoral in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries directly challenge the Puritan ideology of self-denial, the masculinization of desire, the othering of women, and the pervasive insistence on female chastity. Women use the form of the pastoral for self-exploration, dramatization, and expression. The pastorals of Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe offer a powerful revision of a masculinist tradition, by constructing a space for the articulation of female desire, spirituality, and retirement, and also by challenging the heteronormativity in the pastoral tradition and in culture at large. Exploring sexuality, relationships, politics, marriage, and social issues from a personal and intimate perspective lends insight into the creative mind and life of the Restoration female poet.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Messenger, *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (New York: AMS Press, 2001):1.

<sup>2</sup> While Marilyn Williamson has given brief attention to Behn the pastoral poet in *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750*, and Judith Kegan Gardiner notes the interplay of pastoral conventions and narrative in early modern English women's poetry in "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Utopian Longings in Behn's Lyric Poetry," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*, for the most part, scholars have been satisfied with arguing that a Golden Age ethos is merely a vehicle for social criticism. Of course, poets could deploy the pastoral to consider and examine relations among property and ambition, but for Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe, I argue that the form also provides a basis for reconstructing gender and sexuality.

While it is virtually impossible to define the pastoral, as there are as many versions as there are critics and scholars who write about it,<sup>3</sup> it is possible to identify certain controlling characteristics and qualities of the genre and to trace its history in order to better contextualize the contributions of women to it. A cultivated art form, the pastoral celebrates the ethos of nature over and against the ethos of the town or city, and includes, for the purposes of this study, all degrees of rusticity and nature, whereby the central fiction concerns the lives of the nymphs and swains. The pastoral exists as a longing after innocence and happiness; it is a reaction to the corruption of urban life and all that the city represents. It is driven by the pathetic fallacy, and it strives to express the ideal of otium—liberty, freedom, escape. At its core lies the philosophical antithesis between art and nature, with pastoral poetry representing all art.

Certain questions, then, spin out of this relationship between art and nature: Is art the corruption of nature? Can it provide an ample substitute for, or corrective to, a corrupt world? Is the pastoral as a simple genre innocent and pure, or uncivilized and crude? Can the form be successfully employed for higher purposes? Is the pastoral, as a poetic kind, better suited to the female persona? These are some of the questions that are provoked by much pastoral poetry in general and women's pastoral poetry in particular.

Yet the difficulty in attempting to define the pastoral by establishing particular boundaries involves dealing with the range and variety found in this genre. Historically, it is possible to locate a pastoral identity between its various stages, or perhaps better still by its differences and discontinuities. The pastoral dates back to classical Greek antiquity,

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<sup>3</sup> Literary scholars often disagree about pastoral theory. Ranging from George Puttenham's contention that as the product of an urban culture pastoral poetry's value lies in the form's didactic possibilities, to John Fletcher's conception that the pastoral must reveal the influence of the Golden Age, to Michael McKeon's

with Theocritus in the third century B.C.E. recognized as the father of the form. His idylls, which celebrate the beauty and simplicity of rustic life in Sicily, do not typify the later tradition as they contain elements of realism and address the difficulties of a rural existence not only for shepherds, but also for goatherds, fishermen, serfs, and even housewives. In that same century, Longus wrote *Daphnis and Chloe*, a pastoral romance, which was followed by the pastorals of Bion and Moschus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. In 37 B.C.E., the Latin poet Virgil wrote his *Bucolics*, later called *Eclogues*, which depicted allegorical pastoral scenes celebrating the greatness of Rome. While Theocritus proved to be a model for Virgil, Virgil introduced many new elements to the pastoral, moving his herdsmen from Sicily to Arcadia, for example. In this imaginary topography, gods and men co-exist, thus blurring the distinctions between myth and reality, and subsequently between shepherd and poet. Virgil's herdsmen are figured as refined individuals who aptly express their passions through poetry.

Following the translation of Virgil's *Bucolics* in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century came Petrarch's Latin eclogues, Boccaccio's Italian eclogues, and Mantuan's twelve eclogues. In France, the "pastourelle" was born, a short poem in dialogue in which a minstrel courts a shepherdess, as in *Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion* by Adam de La Halle. In 1471, Poliziano wrote a pastoral romance *Orfeo*, and in 1481 Jacopo Sannazaro wrote and produced the most elaborate of pastoral romances, the *Arcadia*. The two most famous examples of the pastoral play were published in Italy—Tasso's *Aminta* in 1581 and Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* in 1590.

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idea that the pastoral tests the dialectical fluidity of dichotomous oppositions, critical ideas about the genre are numerous and fragmentary.

During the Renaissance the pastoral enjoyed a tremendous revival. From Italy, to France, to England, everyone seemed to be trying his or her hand at it. Three main lines of pastoral composition developed as a result: the eclogue proper, the prose pastoral story and poetical interlude, and the pastoral play. In England, the pastoral became a common feature among Renaissance poets, who reshaped the form in their own fashion after either the Virgilian or Theocritain model, ushering in the concerns of the neoclassical age.<sup>4</sup> Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590) is an epic story in pastoral dress, and Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579) employs the pastoral as a vehicle for political and religious discussion.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the French critics Rene Rapin, in his *Eclogae cum Dissertatione de Carmine Pastoralis* (1659), and Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, in his *Poesies Pastorales, avec un Traite sur la Nature de l'Eglogue, et une Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688), argued over the true nature of pastoral, fueling a critical debate over classical art and rustic nature, part of the larger battle of the ancients and moderns. Rapin's and Fontenelle's essays were translated into English by the end of the seventeenth century, and they proved to be the foundation of neoclassical criticism of pastoral in England. Rapin regarded pastoral as an imitation of the actions of

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<sup>4</sup> In the Renaissance, it was found that rustic innocence and simplicity could be employed as sophisticated weapons against the vices of court and city. According to James Sambrook, *English Pastoral Poetry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), much English pastoral was characterized by patriotism and a love of the English countryside. The Elizabethans were fascinated by the notion of the poet-as-shepherd, who, according to Sambrook, became the most favored persona among lyric poets (134-35).

James Turner suggests in *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) that landscape poetry thrived in a time of political conflict because it came to represent both an idyll and a model, an escape and a solution. He suggests that if an aesthetic structure seems both convincing and comprehensive, as the new landscape aimed to be, then it will come to be accepted as a form or reality—a version of the world (48). Turner goes on to suggest that there is a common ground between topography and political theory. In particular, the peaceful country estate is a model commonwealth; yearning for political settlement is expressed as a blessed land or earthly paradise by which to pursue a state of happiness (85).

shepherds living in a remote or fictitious golden age, whereas Fontenelle saw pastoral as simply a representation of the peacefulness of rural life. Rapin claims to have derived his rules from the ancients, whereas Fontenelle claims to have formulated his rules by the “Natural Light” of his own reason. The dispute between the two critics became an episode in the Battle of the Books.

Alexander Pope and Ambrose Philips took up the concerns of Rapin and Fontenelle in their pastoral works, with Pope using his classical poetic artillery to combat the rustic style of Philips.<sup>5</sup> Others, however, saw the pastoral as an opportunity for ridicule, hence the birth of the mock pastoral, the urban pastoral, and the town eclogue. Jonathan Swift in his “A Pastoral Dialogue,” John Gay in *A Shepherd’s Week*, and Matthew Prior in his “Despairing Shepherd” all took pleasure in deflating the rather stiff conventions of the form.<sup>6</sup> Others used the pastoral to suit their individual poetic purposes, albeit as a backdrop for their love lyrics, as seen in the work of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Michael Drayton, or as a device to express love and lament as in Christopher Marlowe’s famous pastoral lyric, “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” and John Milton’s philosophical and deeply felt pastoral elegy, *Lycidas*.

Like the production of the pastoral, its criticism can be viewed along a historical continuum, and for the purposes of this study I have organized it around three primary waves of scholarship. At the beginning of the twentieth century, three texts in particular

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<sup>5</sup>According to James Sambrook in *English Pastoral Poetry*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983, a critical debate on the nature of pastoral poetry continued through the eighteenth century but the theory sketched in Pope’s *Discourse* attracted progressively fewer supporters. Most critics contented themselves with only the broadest definitions of pastoral poetry: Johnson’s *Rambler* 37 (1750) “Whatsoever, therefore, may, according to the common course of things, happen in the country, may afford a subject for a Pastoral Poet” (102). Sambrook goes on to suggest that by the 1730s and `40s the naturalized eclogue had become “commonplace,” and is everywhere apparent in forms of pastoral other than the eclogue(111).

<sup>6</sup> Petrarch, Mantuan, Spenser, and Ben Jonson also wrote satirical pastorals .

make up the first critical studies on the pastoral,<sup>7</sup> beginning with E.K. Chambers's, *English Pastorals*. This text traces the form from Robert Henryson (1425?-1480?) to George Darley (1795-1846), complete with an introductory historical overview. Chambers sees the one hundred year period following Elizabeth's accession to the throne as the representative period of the pastoral, from which it is possible to judge the pastoral impulse in English verse (xvii). Years later, J.E. Congleton in his study, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England, 1684-1798*, isolated a later historical period, yet replicated much of Chambers's thinking in his overview of the pastoral and maintained that Spenser was the first poet to make the pastoral significant for English writers. Following this study, William Empson, in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, shifted the focus from a historical overview of the pastoral to an identification of different versions of the pastoral, citing from William Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell, John Milton, and John Gay, among others, to illustrate his point that good proletarian art is usually covert pastoral (6). Although somewhat different in scope, these three studies set the standard for subsequent theoretical studies of the pastoral in their limited focus on a collection of male pastoral poets as representatives of the form.

After this first wave of critical studies a series of studies produced between 1969 and 1999 centered on three major strains of thinking: the politics of landscape, pastoral ideologies, and definitions of the pastoral.<sup>8</sup> Further connections can be drawn between

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<sup>7</sup> See E. K. Chambers, *English Pastorals* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1906); J.E. Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England, 1684-1798* (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1952); William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatam & Windus, 1960). See also Frank Kermode, *English Pastoral Poetry, From the Beginnings to Marvell* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> See Maynard Mack, *The Garden and the City; Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope 1731-1743* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1969); Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1969); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the*

these studies in terms of the representative poets chosen by these critics to illustrate the pastoral and the theoretical framing of the pastoral according to binary oppositions, made evident from even a quick glance at the titles of these studies. The country is juxtaposed against the city just as the pastoral is juxtaposed against the following: the poetics of self, pastoral ideology, rural scenery and society, and landscape and memory. Published in 1969, first in this wave of studies was Maynard Mack's *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope 1731-1743*, which traces the poetry of Alexander Pope within the context of his varying landscapes from Binfield and Chiswick to the villa at Twickenham and throughout his life. Mack explores Pope's interests as a gardener and landscaper, two activities that he contends had gone almost unnoticed by nineteenth-century critics. In examining the complexities of the landscapes he details, Mack frequently references Renato Poggioli's "The Pastoral of the Self," an article that became a chapter in Poggioli's text *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (1975), in order to conclude that the garden and the grotto supplied Pope with an angle of vision and a place to stand to be a great satirist (232). Also in 1969, Thomas Rosenmeyer investigated the work of Theocritus, in particular the pastoral lyric, and suggested that a definition of the pastoral tradition is simply beyond our reach (3), an issue that Paul Alpers addresses twenty-five years later in his study, *What is Pastoral?*<sup>9</sup> Rosenmeyer claims that the genre is inherently imitative, and he is critical of William Empson's and Renato Poggioli's treatment and conception of the pastoral as too general in

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*City*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1973). See also, Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975); Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer Ltd., 1977). James Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979). See also notes nine and ten for further studies in this second wave.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: U of Chicago P., 1996).

its accommodation. Rosenmeyer emphasizes social criticism as an important element of the pastoral (6), and he claims that critics permitted themselves a wide margin in the interpretation of a pastoral poem. Rosenmeyer further considers the pastoral according to a binary model whereby it obtains its effects by “playing the country against the city, and exploit[s] the tension between them” (207). Like his predecessors, Rosenmeyer relies upon Theocritus, Virgil, Petrarch, Mantuan, Spenser, Jonson, and Milton to craft his historical overview of the pastoral, its landscapes, characters, and representative features.<sup>10</sup>

Following Rosenmeyer’s study, Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* of 1973 further investigated the interrelationship between the country and the city where he focuses his attention on how these powerful terms represent the experience of human communities. His study does not isolate any particular pastoral poet; rather it illustrates how strains of the pastoral took shape as a reflection of the shifting social and historical contexts of England, an idea that would be taken up and developed thirty years later in Donna Landry, Gerald MacLean, and Joseph Ward’s study, *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*.<sup>11</sup> Although comprehensive in its scope of green spaces, Williams’s text frequently relies upon binary oppositions—country/city, pastoral/counter-pastoral, darkness/light—to make sense of the pastoral form. Although I argue in my study that a consideration of the pastoral according to a binary model is reductive, Williams’s text is in keeping with previous thinking of the pastoral to date. After Williams’s study, James Turner investigated the pastoral by focusing on the politics of landscape and

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<sup>10</sup> For an additional comprehensive study on the pastoral see James Sambrook, *English Pastoral Poetry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, Ed. Donna Landry, Gerald MacLean, and Joseph P. Ward. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999).



questioning the notion of “green thought” (4).<sup>12</sup> He too looked at the pastoral in terms of binary relationships, [“the poem has a double status” (2)], and he believed the pastoral to be “an exercise in rhetoric, elaborating purely literary and aesthetic effects” (4). However, he ultimately complicated existing views of the pastoral by coupling the landscape artist with the poet to suggest that the poet can “throw his horizons wider, and suggest an endless array of scenes and places” (24). He believed that the landscape could be used as both a model and as a delusion whereby the boundaries between subject and inanimate object become fuzzy and the properties of nature are blurred with the properties of the mind. This idea inspired me to think about the social and intellectual applications of women’s pastoral poetry and to consider pastoral not as aesthetic and individual, but rather social and individual.

The third wave of pastoral criticism, in which I position my study, complicates previous thinking about the pastoral in terms of binary oppositions by exploring the idea of fragmentation and self-exploration.<sup>13</sup> As Judith Haber suggests in her study, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell* (1994), in the Renaissance the binary relationships that Virgil had effected begin to come apart, and fragmentation starts to take place as narrative forces in the pastoral move us beyond Virgil’s suspended moments to “see what exists on the other side of their limits” (53-54). Haber’s work addresses J.E. Congleton’s theories concerning the simplicity and complexity of the pastoral in order to suggest an interconnectedness of the simple and the complex through

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<sup>12</sup> See also, Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Random House, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valery* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987); Judith Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994); Ann Messenger, *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry*. (New York: AMS Press, 2001).

the figures of the naïve shepherd and the sophisticated poet. Haber argues that as we move from the static nature of the conventional pastoral songs of the shepherd to the movement of the poet's narrative, we are confronted with more disruptive and disturbing forms of self-enclosed self-division in the pastoral(62). I, too, argue that this movement characterizes women's pastoral poetry. Inverting pastoral values and questioning the relationship between the pastoral poet and her classical predecessors, I believe, are topics of explicit critical debate in women's pastoral poetry. Thus it is interesting to me that while Haber claims that in the seventeenth century the development of a version of pastoral emerged that was more self-reflexive, internalized, and metaphoric—a thoroughly self-conscious, sentimental pastoral (98), she uses the poetry of Andrew Marvell, and not that of women poets, to make this argument.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Annabel Patterson's study, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valery*, also challenges the dominant practice among critics of Renaissance poetry to view pastoral as a static, idealizing genre, whose goal was the recovery of an Edenic past; yet she too concentrates solely on male pastoral poets. In 1991, however, Gail David tackled issues of gender and genre in her study, *Female Heroism in the Pastoral*, a subject, she rightly observes, that has been curiously omitted from critical discussions when one considers not only the quantity and quality of pastoral works written by women, but the current critical interest in advancing a theory for a female heroic.<sup>15</sup>

Yet this historical highlighting of pastoral achievements (although replicated in countless studies of the pastoral) and critical studies of the pastoral does little more than

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<sup>14</sup> Here I am thinking of Amelia Lanyer (1569-1645), Lady Mary Wroth (1587?-1651/53), Katherine Fowler Philips (1631-1664), and Aphra Behn (1640-1689).

<sup>15</sup> Gail David, *Female Heroism in the Pastoral*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1991): xii.

create an incomplete outline of the rise of the genre. Women were in fact writing pastorals, and writing them well, as early as the fourteenth century. Pastoralism can be traced in the writings of Julian of Norwich (1342-ca.1416), Christine de Pisan (ca.1364-ca.1430), and Margery Kempe (ca.1373-1438), who refer to nature and the processes of nature in their religious tracts. In the fifteenth century, Dame Juliana Berners (1486) composed poems on hunting and fishing, and later Amelia Lanyer (1569-1645) and Lady Mary Wroth (1587?-1651/53) wrote of pastoral meadows and streams. Katherine Philips (1632-64), Aphra Behn (1640-89), Elizabeth Rowe (1674-1737), Anne Finch (1661-1720), Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656-1710), Mary Collier (1679-1762), Mary Masters (1694?-1771), Lady Mary Wortley Montague (1689-1762), Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle (1623?-1673), Laetitia Pilkington (1712-1750), and Sarah Dixon (fl.1740-?) all tried their hand at the pastoral, and in several of these cases the pastoral was the predominant mode in which they wrote. In fact, the pastoral ultimately was associated with women writers who became increasingly responsible for its production in the eighteenth century.

Although many early modern women wrote pastoral poetry, the three women of this study were chosen in part because of their inventiveness with the form and because the pastoral dominates their poetic production. The widespread employment of pastoral conventions in their epistolary dedications, personal correspondence, amatory verses, translations, religious verses, and death laments suggests that Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe found the pastoral to be a particularly attractive form and one that figured throughout the entirety of their literary careers. Indeed, the majority of their verses are pastoral or contain pastoral elements. This repeated use of the pastoral by Restoration women writers contradicts Renaissance thinking about the form as an elementary stage in a poet's

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schooling. In fact, in light of the models of Virgil and Spenser, the pastoral was often considered in the 1600s to be a suitable testing ground for a poet's abilities. The form was considered as less ambitious than other forms—an exercise in which the poet engaged before approaching more complex models such as the epic. James Sambrook points out that Virgil closes his collection of eclogues with a rejection of pastoral idealism and looks forward to writing on higher themes. He bids farewell to retirement shade, doing so in a simple pastoral image, as the goatherd gets to his feet to drive his flock home (18). In fact, Aristotle considered the pastoral as a “subspecies” of the epic.<sup>16</sup> The most common schematic placing of the pastoral, according to Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*<sup>17</sup> and Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*,<sup>18</sup> was as a low style, and it was this thinking of the pastoral as a modest member that affected many writer's sense of it.<sup>19</sup>

However, for the writing women of this study, the pastoral was not later dismissed for more serious poetic purposes; rather, it appears throughout the entirety of their careers, from commendatory poems to birthday celebrations and even death laments. Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe wrote pastorals from their nascent stages as poets up until their deaths. The pastoral is even envisioned in their conceptions of the afterlife, as in Behn's “On the Death of Mr. Greenhill The Famous Painter” (1680), and Singer Rowe's *Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728), *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1729), and *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737). Behn's, Finch's, and Singer Rowe's

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<sup>16</sup> Cited by Rene Rapin in his *Dissertatio de Carmine Pastoralis*, translated by Thomas Creech and prefixed to his translation of the *Idylliums of Theocritus* (Oxford 1684):18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912-26).

<sup>18</sup> George Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie* 1589. in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Ed G.G. Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904), 2:39-40.

preoccupation with the form suggests that they believed the pastoral to be capable of a much wider interpretation, and thus they used the form to challenge the hegemonic conventions of both genre and gender.

It is easy to see why these women were attracted to the pastoral form, for in many ways it was conducive to the lives and inconsistencies of the writing woman. For the writing female, who often lacked experience of education in classical forms, the flexibility of the pastoral provided entry points to writing. The women discussed in this study chose the pastoral presumably for the same reasons others chose it: it invited experimentation, invention, and creativity. The pastoral allowed the female poet wide margins of poetic freedom and variation within which to experiment because it lacked the complex formal requirements of other poetic forms.<sup>20</sup> In many instances, elements of the pastoral are adopted, changed, or excluded entirely depending upon the needs of the writing woman. Often the pastoral acts as more of a guide than a form, in which the poet is at liberty to pick and choose. In some cases, all that are employed are the familiar pastoral sobriquets, thus hinting at a tradition without adhering to its rules.

The complexity and structure of the pastoral provide another entry point for women writers. While ancient pastoral has historically been defined by its celebration of rural life and rustic values, this truth is actually more complicated. Michael McKeon suggests that a recognition of the country insistently invokes an acknowledgment of the urban, whereby the oppositional structure of country/city encourages value-laden associations of simplicity

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<sup>19</sup> In *The Defense of Poesy* Sidney says this of pastoral: "Is it then the pastoral poem which is mislike? (for perchance where the hedge is lowest, they will soonest leap over)" (27).

<sup>20</sup> For example, when Behn attempted the Pindaric ode, she was accused of having "no Notion of a Pindarick Poem, any farther than it consisted of irregular numbers." *Muses Mercury, or The Monthly Miscellany* (London: Printed by J.H. for Andrew Bell) no. 10 (October 1707): 235-36.

versus sophistication, innocence versus corruption, nature versus art (artifice), etc.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, then, the praise of one term often implies a critique of its reciprocal, and thus the pastoral's tendency to reflect on the rude and simple life from the vantage point of cultivation "works on occasion to satirize these values according to the positive standard of urban cultivation" (269). The structural and presentational premise of the genre works both to affirm and suspend such oppositions, to "oppose nature and art in such a way as to intimate simultaneously their interpenetration" (271). Thus the pastoral, which functions to test the dialectical fluidity of dichotomous oppositions (271), appears to be an ideal genre for women writer's critique of social, political, and poetic convention, because it allows them the opportunity to take advantage of the pastoral's inherent instability. For example, the women of this study mimic the structural complexity of the pastoral's presentation of itself as convention and critique of convention by using the pastoral to problematize "conventional" gender relations. And while I would agree that they use the form to critique certain social practices, such as the effect of property and ambition upon sexual relationships, they employ the form as a site of both invention and experimentation to actually rewrite constructions of gender and sexuality.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, they use the form to

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<sup>21</sup> Michael McKeon, "The Pastoral Revolution," *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998): 267-89.

<sup>22</sup> A distinction should be made between male and female uses of the pastoral. According to Gail David, popular thinking on the pastoral suggests that the pastoral land for the male hero is a place of refuge and transformation in which the hero can leave the court to escape to the pastoral world and integrate its values. In the adopted world, the hero assumes a disguise that may involve cross-dressing or taking on "womanish" ways (as in Sidney's *Arcadia*). At this point the hero might be said to reconcile the binary division of the "masculine" and "feminine" within his potential whole self. In this disguise, the hero develops inwardly and when sufficiently chastened he may return to the action at court. This thinking is very different from my suggestion that women use the form to rewrite constructions of gender and sexuality. Although the pastoral does lend itself to gender transformation in particular, Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe use the pastoral as a place in which the heroine figure can venture forth and invariably return and experience alternative roles and behaviors for women. Thus the frivolity associated with the cross-dressing in *Arcadia* is completely absent in the pastorals of women, discarded in favor of a female drive toward mature self-discovery.

make voyeurism and female desire explicit, to activate the role of the female figure, and to reveal and alter gender dynamics. An investigation of how these poets construct desire, particularly sexual desire, both textually and historically, reveals that they challenge the Puritan ideology of self-denial, the masculinizing of desire, and the creation of woman as other and as object critical to a social ideology that insists on the indivisibility of female chastity and identity. They exploit the heteronormative form of the pastoral and the language of heterosexual love poems to suggest the possibility of homosexual unions.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the fragile nature and flexibility of the form allow women pastoralists to wrestle with competing impulses as Restoration women and writing women. The articulation of personal anxieties, concerns, and experiences as writing women is made possible because the pastoral acts as the site from which these poets can simultaneously suggest and excuse. The form allows the reader to feel satisfied that no breach of decorum has been made. As Arlene Stiebel suggests, “it permits us to deny, dismiss or marginalize that which we do not wish to acknowledge.”<sup>24</sup> The pastoral tradition then protects and disguises true feeling, allowing the poet the liberty to express “without Blushes” (line 7).<sup>25</sup> The doubleness allows for a certain degree of masking in that both the pastoral figures and the pastoral speakers can adopt complex postures, pastoral sobriquets and identifications, blurring the boundaries between poet, subject, and speaker, and allowing the poet the license to renounce poetic responsibility.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, in Behn’s poem “On a Juniper-Tree, cut down to make Busks,” Behn’s love scene transcends a binary model and encourages an interchangeability of partners in a triangle of love-making.

<sup>24</sup> Arlene Stiebel, “Not Since Sappho: The Erotic in Poems of Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn” *Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment England: Literary Representations in Historical Context* (New York: Harrington Park, 1992): 162.

<sup>25</sup> Aphra Behn, “To the Fair Clarinda, who Made Love to Me, Imagin’d More than Woman” *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992).

Finally, the long-standing associations of women with nature, rooted deep within Western culture, in which the simplicity and tenderness of the pastoral form mirror women's nature, suggests another reason why women might have been drawn to the pastoral. Critics of the pastoral have suggested that this "feminine" form was particularly attractive to the female writer because it did not pose a threat to higher male poetic forms and traditions.<sup>26</sup> Disempowered by the critical generic hierarchy then, the pastoral is a suitable form for women to dabble in; it is lady-like to write pastorals. Yet this suggestion is subject to criticism when we consider that the "softer subjects" of the pastoral are in fact rejected by these poets in favor of more controversial thematic matter. Their thematic range and variety, tackling everything from gender relationships to social roles; their complication of the pastoral narrative and its figures, in particular the heroine figure; and the frequency of the pastoral throughout their literary careers, from death laments to courtly celebrations, are all major variations in women's employment and creation of pastoral.

While these various points of entry suggest possibilities as to why Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe may have been attracted to the pastoral, prior to an investigation of their works it is necessary to define what the Golden Age means for these poets in order to illustrate how they manipulate this topos to talk about gender and sexuality. The myth of the Golden Age can be traced back as far as Hesiod (ca. 700 B.C.E.), for whom it referred to the period before the Olympian gods seized power, when gods and men lived together under one rule. It was imagined as an age of civilization without discontent, an era of plenty, where passions were not to admit reasoning. It was a time of liberation and freedom unconstrained by war, work, ambition, and politics. Golden Age mythology was

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth V. Young, "Aphra Behn, Gender, and Pastoral" *Studies in English Literature*. 33 (1993): 523.



later frequently blended with its analogue, the myth of Eden before the Fall in the Christian era, and it was imagined with new intensity in the Italian Renaissance when authors such as Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) and Battista Guarini (1583-1612) envisioned it as a time of sexual freedom. In the Elizabethan period, the Golden Age topos was revived once more as authors employed the mythology for political, social, and religious purposes.

According to Eugene Cunnar, in “Fantasizing a Sexual Golden Age in Seventeenth-Century Poetry,” the Golden Age myth contained within it a subtheme that reflected directly on facets of male desire and “male poets’ attempts to retain power over the representation of the female for that desire.”<sup>27</sup> Cunnar suggests that the male myth of a sexual Golden Age does not represent an appeal to mutual freedom but instead embodies a male power play—a discourse of desire that supports patriarchal assumptions about and control over woman. Poets employ the myth as a means of seducing the reluctant mistress by promising that their love will be mutual and free from inhibiting social conventions, that is, as innocent as it was in the Golden Age.

Other competing ideas of the myth in the seventeenth century suggest that the Golden Age was a world of peace and content, which could, however, be disturbed by war and social abuse. The idyllic backdrop of the Golden Age provided a kind of dialectical framework in which to “work out the tensions between court and city, culture and country simplicity, between Paradise and hardship, unfettered freedom and the responsibilities and limitations of normal life, between Nature and Art.”<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the Golden Age served as a model or image of heavenly life on earth and the search for the ideal. As an

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<sup>27</sup> Eugene R. Cunnar, “Fantasizing a Sexual Golden Age in Seventeenth-Century Poetry” in *Renaissance Discourses of Desir*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: U of Missouri P. 1993):180.

inherently conservative myth, it sought to preserve values and served as a moral, political, or ecclesiastical model.

An examination of how such Golden Age mythologies are translated and represented in the pastoral poetry of women reveals the ways these poets draw from several different traditions and Golden Age mythologies in order to arrive at their own unique version, one that easily accommodates discussions about love, gender, and female sexuality. Upon investigation, we see hints of Theocritus, who believed the Golden Age to have been a time of mutual and reciprocal homoerotic love, free from jealousy and unhappiness, as illustrated in Theocritus's "Idyll" 12, and in Behn's "To the Fair Clarinda Who Made Love to Me Imagined More than Woman."

In addition to Golden Age motifs, restoration women writing pastoral frequently adopt the Ovidian love combat and appropriate the conventions of Ovidian seduction poems, such as in Behn's subversive poem about the language and action of desire, "The Disappointment," and in Finch's "A Letter to Daphnis" and "An Invitation to Daphnis." Other poetic influences include Bucolic masquerade and allegory, as well as a Theocritean sense of beauty and Horatian motifs of country retirement. The influence of Virgil's *Bucolics* is noticeable in Behn's presentation of both a rustic and mannered nature in such pieces as her translation "Of Plants" from Abraham Cowley's *Six Books of Plants*. Furthermore, Finch's pastorals celebrating lawful married love resemble Mantuan's first three Eclogues, in which Faustus and Fortunatus discuss the joys of marital love and the pains of illicit passion. Finally, their use of dialogic structures, the poetic competition, the suggestion of courtship, and storytelling are all strategies employed by other pastoralists such as Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe, and Marvell.

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<sup>28</sup> Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1977).

An investigation of the pastoral verses of Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe reveals a certain commonality in their engagement with pastoral conventions and their emphasis and development of pastoral attributes that differs from their male contemporaries. Specifically, a point of commonality occurs in their uses of the pastoral to expose personal concerns such as the protection of a reputation, an individual quest for fame, an identification with other writers, the negotiation of a space from which to write, or a desire for approval from loved ones and fellow poets.

In the chapter on Aphra Behn, we see the poet wrestling with the task of aligning dual allegiances as woman and writer most clearly through the creation of her Arcadian heroines. These figures, who speak with both force and clarity, regardless of decorum, challenge patriarchal assumptions about the nature of woman and female desire. Like the writing woman then, Behn's heroines pose a threat to masculine identity and structures of power. Behn employs male figures to define and satisfy female desire, and through her heroines she creates a female speaking voice who poeticizes with the utmost of authorial power.

Anne Finch's struggle as woman and writer is most visible in her quest to locate a space from which to write. Her pastorals consistently attempt to define a suitable space for the writing woman, one that does not infringe upon male territory and one that does not seek reward. She demarcates the pastoral as a space conducive to her writing as a woman poet, as the dark of the shade provides contentment without threat. In her pastorals, Finch consistently struggles with her exclusion from poetic authority, referring to herself as "unskilled" and "weak" and claiming that her poetic attempts are at best suited for close

friends. Thus by locating her verses within the space of the shade, and directing her works towards circles of friends, she frees herself from the scrutiny of other poetic contenders.

Elizabeth Singer Rowe also grapples with issues of identity, and she uses the pastoral to find some resolution. As a religious figure, a woman, a political dissenter, and writer, Singer Rowe struggles with a multiplicity of subject positions, yet she manages to unify these competing selves by employing the pastoral to express her ideas on religion and love, both earthly and divine. We are made aware of her conflicting desires between the woman as society views her and her visions as a writer through particular articulations on solitude and choice that appear and reappear in her pastoral poems. Alone, her female protagonists find the freedom to speak uninhibitedly, hence alleviating the frustrations of silence. Her heroines retreat to the country by their own choice, and thus the opportunity for choice and voice become paramount to her pastoral articulations and necessary to her agenda as a writing woman. Moreover, Singer Rowe's pastoral space is a liberating space that allows the female poet the freedom for imaginative exploits and devotion. Singer Rowe is able to unify her reputation as a religious figure and her need for expression as a poet by creating a pastoral space conducive to her spiritual endeavors, one that is characterized by choice and fosters meditation, tranquility, and personal reflection.

Another point of commonality among the women of this study is their use of the pastoral landscape. Although the received wisdom on the pastoral landscape is various, from Theocritus's use of the landscape as a backdrop<sup>29</sup> to Horace's landscapes that often enter in the action of the poem "whereby the details are less contrived, [and] the fields and woods breathe a spirit..." (Rosenmeyer 182), if one surveys the body of traditional pastoral

verse, nature is frequently “little more than the locale, pleasant and innocuous, for [the poet’s] elegiac reflections” (Rosenmeyer 182). For example, nature serves an ornamental function for Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey in his pastorals: “upon his head always he ware/A wreath of willow tree” (“Harpalus’ Complaint...,” lines 39-40). John Fletcher’s shepherd uses nature to seduce his lover:

Shall I dive into the sea,  
And bring the coral, making way  
Through the rising waves that fall  
In snowy fleeces? Dearest, shall  
I catch thee wanton fawns, or flies  
Whose woven wings the summer dyes  
Of many colours? Get thee fruit,  
Or steal from Heaven an Orpheus’ lute?...  
(“The Satyr’s Service,” lines 13-20)

For Edmund Spenser, the pastoral landscape is an idealized space against which the actions of the characters are set:

The simple ayre, the gentle warbling wynde,  
So calme, so coole, as no where else I fynde;  
The grassye grounde with daintye Daysies dight,  
The Bramble bush, where Byrds of every kynde  
To the waters fall their tunes attemper right.

(*Colin Clout* “June,” lines 4-8)

Furthermore, Sir Philip Sidney’s landscapes are often stylized and static, to be enjoyed for their own sake. Such an example can be seen in the poem “Dorus to Pamela”: “their pasture is fair hills of fruitless love” (line 2). Nicholas Breton’s landscapes, such as that in “Olden Love-Making,” are similar to the stylized landscapes of Sidney. In Michael

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<sup>29</sup> According to Rosenmeyer, Theocritus avoids the temptation of allowing nature full play: his scenery is “lightly sketched in” (191). Rosenmeyer says that one of the features of Theocritus’s art is his refusal to describe (191).

Drayton's "Description of Elizium," the pastoral landscape is a paradise on earth, where "delights never fade" (line 5) in the shade and pleasure of "many a stately tree" (lines 6-7).

Critical responses to the purpose and function of the pastoral landscape are equally various. For Paul Alpers, a difference between representations of landscape and representations of nature emerged in the Renaissance. The notion of humility in labor that characterizes georgic opposes the artificial and idealized landscapes of the pastoral (37). For James Turner, the main features of the pastoral landscape are attractiveness, realism, comprehensiveness, and an organized structure (33). This organization of structure for Turner represents an Augustan ideal (12). For James Sambrook, the pastoral sketches sweet landscapes (13); one of the most popular pastoral forms involves lighthearted and circumstantial descriptions of seductions in idyllic surroundings (60). Finally, Thomas Rosenmeyer suggests that while pastoral poets such as Horace created an active nature, the "interaction between soul and setting is more congenial to the epic" (184).

The women of this study destabilize existing notions of the pastoral landscape as an idealized and organized space, unsuitable for the interaction of soul and setting. Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe use the landscape in personal and intimate ways that undermine the whole attempt of the pastoral to construct stable binary categories of oppositional difference. Specifically their landscapes undo the binary opposition between setting and characters. Complicating the role of nature by making it an active participant in the action of the poem and creating landscapes that are far less stylized and artificial in their works make the relationship and/or interaction between setting and character more plausible. For instance, Behn complicates the role of nature in her poem "On a Juniper-Tree, cut down to make Busks." Narrated from the perspective of the tree, the poem radically twists and

exploits the conventions of the pastoral setting through this personification. Behn uses the tree both as a convention of the Arcadian landscape and as a tool to suggest a variation on the pastoral love duet. The tree is the site of sexual pleasure and an active participant in the sexual threesome.

Finch's use of nature is equally complicated. Investigating the landscapes of Finch's pastoral retreats illuminates her pastoral priorities: her desire to use the pastoral to investigate gender difference and the contemporary social ideologies and attitudes that center on women's roles and behaviors. Finch often adopts the common theme of a celebration of a virtuous retreat in nature set in opposition to the space of the court, as in "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat." Yet an analysis of this poem reveals that Finch's space of retreat is more complicated than the typical country space. Finch uses the pastoral as a means of formalizing what she opposes by making known her version of an absolute retreat space. Retreat for Finch is perceived as representing a world and form of community, alternative to that of the court, where life is pure, women are free, and joys are humble.

Unlike the landscape of her male pastoral contemporaries, Finch's pastoral space is distinguished by its fluidity. Finch frequently summons up a landscape of weeping clouds and rivers, where motifs are freely borrowed from other poets in order to create her pastoral space. Although the pastoral is generally contemplated as a static place, a moment in the eternal present, the fluidity of Finch's pastoral landscape both contradicts this thinking and works to her advantage as it allows Finch the freedom and space to articulate a host of desires and progressive ideas. She is not confined by the space but rather encouraged to express herself in an environment that moves and winds about. What is uttered in her

pastoral space exists as a fleeting moment and is quickly glossed over by the movement of the poem. Furthermore, the very configuration of shade and wandering and wavering can be read as feminine, and Finch makes it clear that her freedom consists solely in the fact that no men are near. Her retreat space is a place where she is free from domestic duty and female frivolity, and a place where she discovers the security needed to experience absolute freedom.

Finally, Singer Rowe complicates the role of nature by making it the speaker's confidante and friend through the use of personification and by specifically gendering it as feminine. Although the pastoral landscape is frequently imaged as female, whereby the questing male conquers the unblemished and fertile,<sup>30</sup> Singer Rowe revives this convention by employing nature as a replacement for the figure of the swain. Singer Rowe exchanges man for nature, who proves to be more receptive to her complaints and feelings. For example, in her poem "By Dispair" nature is described as being more receptive to the complaints of the nymph than the swain: "The wind less deaf, than my ungreatful Swain" (line 13). Singer Rowe does not depict the rural landscape as a submissive female, as typically presented in traditional pastoral; rather, nature is compassionate; she is sensitive, supportive, active and loving. The speaker in her loose, hanging artless tresses sinks to the bending grass, a symbol of pastoral humility, and breathes her heavy sighs. The darkness of the night mimics the darkness of her fate; the river flows like the movement of her hanging tresses. Despair comes over her face and her tears swell like the floods; the rocks relent as oft as she groans; the air breathes and she sighs. Nature and woman exist in perfect harmony.

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the victimization of women and landscape, see Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (Charlotte: U of North Carolina P, 1975).



Such gendering of nature is a complex process as it not only triggers complicated patterns of desire and culturally complex acts that function on many different levels; it also potentially transgresses sexual and social taboos. Coupling nature and woman in this intimate manner results in queer moments that disrupt the binary categories of the pastoral. These sensual moments cannot entirely be undone by the ultimate return of culturally sanctioned sexual and status arrangements, for Singer Rowe continually contests conventional roles and plays with these moments of intimacy: “And down I sunk, upon the bending grass, / There to the streams, my mournful griefs relate...” (“By Dispair,” lines 8-9). Unlike the “ungreatful Swain,” and not wanting to “increase [her] pain,” nature mimics the speaker’s words with gentle sensitivity. They talk in unison, “Ah, never, never, said I with an Air, / no, never, never, she reply’d again” (lines 15 and 18). The quiet but gentle sensitivity that nature willfully offers the speaker through this dialogue, and the language Singer Rowe chooses to relate this bond are both compassionate and sensual and serve to problematize the dynamics of desire and representation.

Finally, examining the ideological complexities in the writing of these poets can serve to demonstrate how sexual and political authority are often depicted as overlapping, another point of departure from the pastorals of their male contemporaries. Despite Renato Poggioli’s belief that the pastoral hero treats woman as an object, even if a free and willing one (53), Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe manage to embody subversive female stories that picture heroines who are capable of influencing their own sexual and political positions not as a means of countering male oppression, but rather as a means of suggesting their own authorial power. This variation contradicts traditional notions of pastoral love in which the pastoral hero objectifies the woman. The typical pastoral formula of swain in pursuit of

nymph is revised by these poets in favor of more dramatic and complex narratives in which developing female personalities deviate from typical pastoral patterns. It is not uncommon in women's pastorals to find nymphs in pursuit of swains or even other nymphs.

Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe also use the pastoral as a political tool to expose destructive power relations in order to deconstruct them. Specifically, they expose the nature of sexual relationships and their inherent inequalities. For example, all of these women use the pastoral to suggest a new concept of love, one divorced from hierarchical structures of power and based rather on mutuality and reciprocity. Although Renato Poggioli suggests in his study that pastoral married love and wedded bliss are almost contradictions in terms,<sup>31</sup> women's pastorals prove otherwise. For example, Finch employs her husband as a replacement for the swain figure and plays with *carpe diem* themes by using the conventions of the masculine seduction poem as a vehicle for female expression to defend the institution of marriage and the role of the wife. In "The Cautious Lovers," she speaks of infidelity, inconstancy, and the hazards of idolatry in love as the dangerous consequences of a love that is not mutual. In "To Chloe. An Epistle," Singer Rowe speaks of a country retreat that encourages mutual love, both secular and divine, and that celebrates freedom in marital bliss between the nymph and swain. Their pastorals exist as acts of negotiation, where desire is weighed against an adherence to social codes.

Complicating the pastoral narrative yields more complex pastoral figures. Using Susan Staves's suggestion from *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* that an ideological consensus following Charles II's restoration in 1660 generated a search

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<sup>31</sup> Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975): 55.

for new models for social behavior in contemporary literature,<sup>32</sup> I argue that these poets attempt to deploy the figure of the Arcadian heroine as a means of evolving a new concept of the masculine subject while simultaneously fluctuating between a theory of female subordination and female libertinism. These early modern women poets press the claims of both masculinity and femininity in a single body by claiming that it is through the heroine's femininity as well as her masculine assertions that new models of female social behavior are possible. The narrative and lyrical strategies of these pastoral poets often register an unresolved confusion, whereby woman is "subject" in the role of the female writer and is represented as "subjected woman" in the figure of the heroine within the social order. Thus contrary to Renato Poggioli's thinking that "the passivity of the pastoral heroine emphasizes again that her dominant traits must be the naïve candor and the charming immaturity of youth,"<sup>33</sup> Behn's nymphs, for example, are aggressive and self-centered. They use their feminine powers for their own purposes. They pursue and are often defeated, yet ultimately they seek sexual conquest and personal gratification. They easily adopt the libertine practices typically associated with the swain, yet their existence is more than a mere role reversal. Behn's masquerading of gender throughout her pastorals is both a testament to her search for other representations of a female self and an authorization and validation of alternative female roles and practices.

In order to treat seriously the pastoral poems of these authors, we must develop new methods of reading, new modes for determining what constitutes valuable poetry, and new contexts from which to read. The pastoral inventions and variations of these early modern women are a testament to their innovativeness as writers, poets, and artists. Furthermore,

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Staves, *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1979).

their ability to redirect the pastoral tradition allows us as readers to understand their relationship to the male poetic tradition through their changes from their source. These pastorals do not merely offer model countercultures that contrast with contemporary society. Rather, these poems consistently use the conventions of the pastoral “to free their explorations into the psychology of desire from entanglement with the social constraints that make the consequences of desire oppressive for women.”<sup>34</sup> Their pastorals speak of a space in which love that is not socially approved may flourish, where women are free to speak as sexualized subjects and to express their thoughts, feelings and desires absent of guilt. By exploiting the artificiality of the Golden Age, which requires no connection with the living world, Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe produce a new and exciting kind of verse in which they are free to articulate new positions for women that have real world consequences. Their pastorals call for a refinement of traditional pastoral ideals and encourage the creation of a female-specific space from which to characterize this particular poetic oeuvre as a whole, and from which to read their art and world. Finally, the pastoral creations of Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe foreground the woman writer’s unique challenge to masculine dominance in the field of female representation and the tradition of pastoral poetry. Their contributions and variations certainly alter the genre of the pastoral, and when included alongside studies of “male” pastoral they serve to illustrate the full range of the genre.

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<sup>33</sup> Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975): 53.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, “Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect” *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 7, nos.1-2 (1980): 74.

## **Bold Nymphs and Sexy Scenes: Aphra Behn's Pastorals**

- I. Introduction: Aphra Behn's Appropriation of the Pastoral and its Appeal
- II. Influences/Predecessors of Behn
- III. Behn's Representations of the Golden Age
- IV. Behn's Representations of Love and Relationships
- V. Behn's Subversive Treatment of Gender and Sexuality

## Introduction

Aphra Behn wrote over forty pastoral poems that appear in her own collections and those of others. Her widespread employment of pastoral conventions in her epistolary dedications, personal correspondence, and death laments suggests that she found the pastoral to be a particularly attractive form, and one that appears throughout the entirety of her literary career.<sup>35</sup> Although several critics have discussed aspects of Behn's use of the pastoral form and mode, none has approached Behn's overall career as that of a pastoral poet: Marilyn Williamson explores Behn and the pastoral and country life; Judith Kegan Gardiner discusses how pastoral conventions operate in Behn's erotic poems; Rachel

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<sup>35</sup> Behn's appropriation of the pastoral dominates her own collections: *Covent Garden Drolery, or a Collection, of all the Choice Songs, Poems, Prologues, and Epilogues (Sung and Spoken at Courts and Theaters never in Print before. Written by the refined'st Witts of the Age and Collected by A.B.* (1672); *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (1684); and *Miscellany, Being a Collection of Poems By Several Hands Together with Reflections on Morality, or Seneca Unmasked* (1685). Behn's pastorals also appear in works written or edited by others, including *A Collection of Poems Written Upon Several Occasions By Several Persons* (1673), in which appears Behn's "A Song in the Dutch-Lover." In *Poems on Several Occasions by the Right Honourable, The Earl of Rochester* (1680), a collection of racy poems and sundry subjects, we find three of Behn's poems: "The Disappointment," "On a Giniper Tree now cut down to make Busks," and "On the Death of Mr. Greenhill The Famous Painter." All three are pastorals, including the death lament that figures Greenhill's afterlife in pastoral terms. Behn's inclusions in *Female Poems On Several Occasions* (1682), "Love's Revenge," "Jemmy," and "To Scornful Sylia," again are all pastorals. And in her dedicatory epistle, "On the Author of that excellent and learned Book, entitled, *The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness*," which appears in *The Way to Make All People Rich* (1685), Behn's words to Philotheos Physiologus prove to be as much an elaboration of her concept of the Golden Age as a dedication to Physiologus. Additional pastorals of Behn appear in works edited by others. Gildon's *Miscellany Poems Upon Several Occasions Consisting of Original Poems, By the Late Duke of Buckingham, Mr. Cowley, Mr. Milton, Mr. Prior, Mrs. Behn, Mr. Thos. Brown, &c* (1692), contains translations by Abraham Cowley and includes contributions by William Congreve, John Milton, and Robert Boyle. Only two women writers are included in this volume, Aphra Behn and Madam Anne Wharton. Of Behn's three contributions, "On a Conventicle," "Verses design'd by Mrs. Behn to be sent to a Fair Lady, &c.," and "Venus and Cupid," two are pastorals. Behn's poem "Verses design'd by Mrs. A. Behn..." situates a love lament in a rural setting, a scene common to many of Behn's pastorals. Several other editions and collections of poems include Behn's pastorals: *The Six Days Adventure* (1671), *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), *Young Jemmy, Or, The Princely Shepherd* (1681), *A Most Excellent New Ballad* (1681), *Beauties Triumph, or, The Joys of Faithful Lovers Made Compleat* (1682?), *The Compleat Courtier* (1683), *T. Lucretius Carus. The Epicurean Philosopher, His Six Books De Natura Rerum Done into English Verse with Notes* (1683), and posthumously, *The History of Adolphus, Prince of Russia, And the Princess of Happiness* (1691), and *The Muses Mercury, or the Monthly Miscellany Consisting of Poems, Prologues, Songs, Sonnets, Translations, and other Curious Pieces, never before Printed* (1707-08). For a complete listing of Behn's contributions in these collections see O'Donnell, Mary Ann. *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1986.

Crawford uses two of Behn's pastorals to establish a framework for discussing bower conventions and Victorian, female pastoral poets; and Elizabeth Young profiles a handful of Behn's pastorals. The absence of sustained attention to Behn's pastorals needs redress.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike many poets who considered the pastoral to be "motivated by naïve idyllicism"<sup>37</sup> and a testing ground before approaching higher models such as the epic, I argue in this chapter that Behn's employment of the pastoral was a preoccupation that occurred throughout the entirety of her career. Specifically, Behn uses the pastoral form as a site of both invention and experimentation, going as far as to rewrite constructions of gender and sexuality. Critical to her pastorals is a refiguring of the Arcadian heroine. Behn transforms a sexual archetype used to express male desire into the figures of promiscuous vixen, selfish nymph, "lesbian" lover, dominatrix, and independent woman. Behn's Arcadian heroines do not hesitate to acknowledge their own desires; rather, they speak with both force and clarity and act without regard to rules of decorum. Through a close reading of her pastorals, such as in "Song" from *The Wavering Nymph, or Mad Amyntas*, "The Complaint," and "The Return," I argue that her heroines challenge patriarchal assumptions about the nature of women, female desire, and the male myth that figures a heterosexual Golden Age based on fantasies designed to secure power over women and alleviate male sexual and social anxieties.

While pastoral conventions typically articulate male subjectivity, where the enclosed green space is identified with female sexuality and the questing subject who

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<sup>36</sup> Heidi Laudien, "From Pastoral to 'Pastorelle': A New Context for Reading Aphra Behn" *Aphra Behn: Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity* ed. Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq, and Guyonne Leduc (Paris: L'Harmattan Press, 2000). It should be noted that this publication came early in my graduate work, and my thinking about creating a subgenre of the pastoral, dubbed the "pastorelle," to accommodate the works of women pastoralists, has since changed.

enters this space with masculinity, Behn details an alternate sexual economy wherein the figure of the heroine often poses a threat to masculine identity and sexual prowess. Male figures are employed as a means of defining, and satisfying, female desire. Furthermore, I argue that Behn manipulates the form as a site of invention to make voyeurism and female desire explicit, to animate the role of the female figure, and to reveal and alter gender dynamics.

I begin the chapter by arguing that Behn's attraction to the pastoral form was more than a passing fancy, and I make this point by highlighting several examples from her body of works that illustrate her preoccupation with the pastoral throughout her career. From there, I argue that while Behn was influenced by her classical predecessors such as Theocritus and Virgil, she cleverly reworks conventions and traditions to give voice to her pastoral priorities: her desire to use the pastoral to investigate gender difference and the contemporary social ideologies and attitudes that center on women's roles and behaviors. In order to make this argument, I pinpoint several places where Behn deviates from her classical models. Specifically, I compare Torquato Tasso's opening chorus in Act I of his play *Aminta* with Behn's translation of the poem, "The Golden Age. A Paraphrase on a Translation" in order to argue that certain revisionary moments in Behn's version are particularly revelatory of her Golden Age philosophy and are critical to an understanding of her pastoral poems. Finally, through a close reading of several of her pastoral poems that illustrate representations of love and relationships and subversive treatments of gender and sexuality, I conclude that these poems consistently use the conventions of the pastoral to liberate Behn's explorations into the psychology of desire, and that the pastoral provides

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1996): ix.



the perfect space for Behn to express radical values of liberty, equality, and sorority without shame or fear of transgressing convention. The chapter presents important “correctives” by taking seriously the work of Behn, specifically how she takes up issues of gender and sexuality in her pastorals, and it makes a broader critique of the pastoral form itself as both limiting and expansive for women poets.

## Behn's Appropriation of the Pastoral and its Appeal

Behn's appropriation of the pastoral predominates her own collections: *Covent Garden Drolery, or a Collection, of all the Choice Songs, Poems, Prologues, and Epilogues (Sung and Spoken at Courts and Theaters never in Print before) Written by the refined'st Wits of the Age and Collected by A.B. (1672)*; *Poems Upon Several Occasions (1684)*; and *Miscellany, Being a Collection of Poems By Several Hands Together with Reflections on Morality, or Seneca Unmasked (1685)*. Even the dedicatory epistle to Sir William Clifton, which appears in her *Miscellany*, extols Clifton's virtues and character using the language of retreat and illustrates pastoral values.

Behn's pastorals also appear in works written or edited by others, including *A Collection of Poems Written Upon Several Occasions By Several Persons (1673)*, in which appears Behn's "A Song in the Dutch-Lover." In *Poems on Several Occasions by the Right Honourable, The Earl of Rochester (1680)*, a collection of racy poems and sundry subjects, we find three of Behn's poems: "The Disappointment," "On a Giniper Tree now cut down to make Busks," and "On the Death of Mr. Greenhill The Famous Painter."<sup>38</sup> All three are pastorals, including the death lament that figures Greenhill's afterlife in pastoral terms:

...The famous Greenhill's dead! Ev'n he,  
That cou'd to us give immortality,  
Is to th' Eternal, silent Groves, withdrawn,  
Those sullen Groves, of Everlasting Dawn;  
Youthful as Flow'rs scarce blown, whose opening  
Leaves,  
A wond'rous and a fragrant Prospect gives,  
Of what its Elder Beauties wou'd display,

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<sup>38</sup> This poem is an unusual inclusion in this collection. The majority of the other poems center on sexually-oriented topics such as "The Imperfect Enjoyment," "To Love," "The Maim'd Debauchee," "The Argument," "Upon Nothing," several poems on satire, "Upon his leaving his mistress," and "Upon his drinking a bowl," etc.

When it shou'd flourish up to ripening May!

(lines 8-16)

Notice how Behn appears almost distracted by the presence of the grove in line eleven as she shifts her attention from the lament and pauses on the grove's beauties. Even in a death lament, the groves are very much alive, appearing "youthful" and smelling wonderfully "fragrant." And it is this grove, with its everlasting presence, that repeatedly surfaces in her work regardless of theme or circumstance.

Behn's contributions to *Female Poems On Several Occasions* (1682), "Love's Revenge," "Jemmy," and "To Scornful Sylia," again are all pastorals. And in her dedicatory epistle, "On the Author of that excellent and learned Book, entitled, The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness," which appears in *The Way to Make All People Rich* (1685), Behn's words to Philotheos Physiologus prove to be as much an elaboration of her concept of the Golden Age as a dedication to Physiologus:

Haile learned Bard! That dost thy power dispence,  
And sho'st us the first state of Innocence,  
That happy Golden Age, when man was Young,  
When the whole Race was vigorous and strong;  
When Nature did her wonderous Dictates give,  
And taught the noble Savage how to live;  
When Christal Streams, and every plentious Wood  
Afforded harmless Drink and wholesome Food...  
Till wild Debauchery did the Mind invade,  
And Vice and Luxury become a Trade;  
Surer than War it laid whole Countries waste,  
Nor Plague, nor Famine ruin'd half so fast:  
By swift degrees we took the poison in,  
Regarding not the danger, nor the Sin.  
Delightful, Gay and Charming was the Bait,  
While Death did on the inviting Pleasures wait  
And every Age produc'd a feebl' Race,  
Sickly their days, and those declin'd a-pace,  
Scarce Blossoms blew, and wither in less space...  
These are the Plagues that o're this I stand reign,  
And has so many three score Thousands strain,

Till you the Saving Angel, whose blest hand  
Has sheath'd that Sword that threatn'd half the Land...  
(lines 1-46 shortened)

Behn uses this dedication as an opportunity for social critique, for it is not until the final moments of the poem that she arrives at her praise of Physiolgus as the “Saving Angel” who has the power to protect against the “plagues” ensuing a lost Golden Age, a theme that fascinates Behn, and one that she returns to throughout her career.

Additional pastorals of Behn appear in works edited by others.<sup>39</sup> Gildon's *Miscellany Poems Upon Several Occasions Consisting of Original Poems, By the Late Duke of Buckingham, Mr. Cowley, Mr. Milton, Mr. Prior, Mrs. Behn, Mr. Thos. Brown, &c* (1692), contains translations by Abraham Cowley and includes contributions by William Congreve, John Milton and Robert Boyle. Only two women writers are included in this volume, Aphra Behn and Madam Anne Wharton. Of Behn's contributions, “On a Conventicle,” “Verses design'd by Mrs. Behn to be sent to a Fair Lady, &C.,” and “Venus and Cupid,” two are pastorals. Behn's poem “Verses design'd by Mrs. A.Behn...” situates a love lament in a rural setting, a scene common to many of Behn's pastorals:

In vain to Woods and Deserts I retire,  
To shun the lovely Charmer I admire,  
Where the soft Breezes do but fann my Fire!  
In vain in Grotto's dark unseen I lie,  
Love pierces where the Sun could never spy.  
No place, no Art his Godhead can exclude,  
The Dear Distemper reigns in Solitude...(lines 1-7).

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<sup>39</sup> Several other editions and collections of poems include Behn's pastorals: *The Six Days Adventure* (1671), *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), *Young Jemmy, Or, The Princely Shepherd* (1681), *A Most Excellent New Ballad* (1681), *Beauties Triumph, or, The Joys of Faithful Lovers Made Compleat* (1682?), *The Compleat Courtier* (1683), *T. Lucretius Carus. The Epicurean Philosopher, His Six Books De Natura Rerum Done into English Verse with Notes* (1683), and posthumously, *The History of Adolphus, Prince of Russia, And the Princess of Happiness* (1691), and *The Muses Mercury, or the Monthly Miscellany Consisting of Poems, Prologues, Songs, Sonnets, Translations, and other Curious Pieces, never before Printed* (1707-08). For a complete listing of Behn's contributions in these collections see O'Donnell, Mary Ann. *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1986.

In *Familiar Letters of Love, Gallantry, and Several Occasions, By the Wits of the Last and Present Age* (1718), two letters in particular illustrate the significance Behn bestows upon country living and her propensity to figure all elements of life in rural terms:

*My Dear,*

*In your last, you admir'd how I cou'd pass my Time so long in the Country: I am sorry your Taste is so deprav'd, as not to relish a Country-Life. Now, I think there's no Satisfaction to be found amidst an Urban Throng (as Mr. Bayes calls it).*

*The peaceful Place, where gladly I resort,  
Is freed from noisy Factions of the court:  
There joy'd with viewing o'er the rural Scene,  
Pleas'd with the Meadows ever green,  
The Woods and Groves with tuneful Anger move,  
And nought is heard, but gentle Sighs of Love:  
The Nymphs and Swains for rural Sports prepare,  
And each kind Youth diverts his smiling Fair...*

(29-30)

In yet another letter, Behn compares her work to a garden:

*My Dear,*

*In your last, you inform'd me, that the World treated me as a Plagiary, and, I must confess, not with Injustice...*

*But let that pass: For being impeach'd of murdering my Moor, I am thankful, since, when I shall let the World know, wherever I take the Pains next to appear in Print, of the mighty Theft I have been guilty of: But, however, for your own Satisfaction, I have sent you the Garden from whence I gather'd and I hope you will not think me*

*vain, If I say, I have weeded and improv'd it...*

(31-32)

Finally, in a love lament to Philander in this same volume, she speaks of the significance of the grove as a place of retreat and mourning:

*...And when the peaceful Gloom of Night appears, it more indulges my unfeigned Sorrow! Oft, when the smiling Morn chases away the misty Shades of Death, with fainting Steps I bend my forward Way, 'till entering beneath a shady Grove, with Sighs and Tears I there renew my Grief. The rustling Winds amidst the leafy Screens! The warbling Birds that chant with tuneful Notes! The murmuring Streams that gently glide along and every other Object else conspire to feed my hapless Flame! (32-3).*

From this sampling it is clear that Behn was attracted to the form and employed it whenever possible. Yet her repeated use of the pastoral throughout the entirety of her literary career contradicts Renaissance thinking about the form as an elementary stage in a poet's schooling, one that eventually was discarded for higher forms. Behn's preoccupation with the pastoral suggests that she believed the form to be capable of a much wider interpretation, specifically to challenge the hegemonic conventions of both genre and gender.

## **Influences and Predecessors of Behn**

Among all of the existing scholarship on Aphra Behn, there is little mention of Behn's poetic influences and pastoral predecessors. In this next section, I argue that while Behn's pastorals resemble those of her classical and Renaissance predecessors, Theocritus, Ovid, Virgil, Horace, and Tasso, ultimately Behn deviates from these traditions. Behn's pastorals can appropriately be categorized by certain operating characteristics including theme and form. For example, her pastorals are similar to the traditional pastourelles composed by the courtly poets of France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in that they are love adventures featuring shepherds, nymphs, and swains, the thematic simplicity of which is often conveyed in a carefree and whimsical manner.

Behn's concept of the pastoral, and the pastoral landscape in particular, clearly blends classical influences with her own invention. We see hints of Theocritus, who believed the Golden Age to have been a time of mutual and reciprocal homoerotic love, free from jealousy and unhappiness, as illustrated in his "Idyll" 12 and in Behn's "To the Fair Clarinda Who Made Love to Me Imagined More than Woman." Behn both employs the Ovidian love combat and appropriates the conventions of Ovidian seduction poems, such as in her subversive poem about the language and action of desire, "The Disappointment." Other poetic influences include Bucolic masquerade and allegory, as well as a Theocritean sense of beauty and Horatian motifs of country retirement. The influence of Virgil's *Bucolics* is noticeable in Behn's presentation of both a rustic and mannered nature in such pieces as her translation "Of Plants" from Abraham Cowley's *Six Books of Plants*. Here we see a very different kind of nature, where laboring rustics exist among "rougher paths of obscure Wood,/ All gloom aloft, beneath o'rgrown with Shrubs"

(lines 3-4). Finally, Behn's use of a dialogic structure, the poetic competition, the suggestion of courtship, and the use of storytelling are all strategies used by other pastoralists.

While it is unclear whether Behn knew Greek, and there is some question about her knowing Latin (there is no evidence to date that her translations from the Latin resulted from anything other than an intermediary translation),<sup>40</sup> it is possible to see in Behn's pastorals structural and conventional characteristics reminiscent of Theocritus, such as the incorporation of nostalgia and metaphor. Like Theocritus, Behn, in describing nature, speaks of an idyllic place complete with lush grasses, whispering elms, fragrant rushes, and vine leaves ("Idyll" 7, 63-64). The sweet smells and sounds of nature are easily paralleled in each author. Certain activities in nature are also similarly explored, from the calm experience of lying under the oak or pine tree shade to listening to the trickle of rushing streams and cooling waters ("Idyll" 7, 63).

Yet Behn varies from her classical predecessor Theocritus. Specifically, a point of departure can be observed in Behn's manipulation of the landscape in which she moves

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<sup>40</sup> In her *Miscellany*, Behn published a poem by someone else related to "Theocrites" and she has in the same volume right next to the "Theocrites" poem a poem out of "Moschus." Of the 35-40 listings of Theocritus from the sixteenth to eighteenth century on the ESTC database, the bulk of the publications, translations, and otherwise, fall in the eighteenth century. There was a 1684 translation into English that was published by the same publisher in Oxford who published Creech's Lucretius (Theocritus, *The Idylliums of Theocritus with Rapin's Discourse of Pastorals done into English*. Oxford: Printed for Anthony Stephens, Bookseller near the Theater, and are to be sold in London by Abel Swalle at the Unicorn at the west end of S. Pauls, 1684). Further, the 1721 edition of Theocritus published by Curll carries Creech's name on the title page (Theocritus, *The Idylliums of Theocritus; with Rapin's discourse upon Pastorals*. Made English by Mr. Creech. The third edition. To which is prefixed, The Life of Theocritus: by Basil Kennet. London: printed for E. Curll, 1721). An additional check of the ESTC under Creech reveals that he was responsible for the translation of Theocritus. So, Creech was translating Theocritus after Behn got to know him. There is circumstantial evidence that she did not meet Creech until the publication of the Lucretius. We can assume that Behn was mixing in with a younger university group, generally Cambridge folk, by 1683. We can further assume that Creech was doing his translations for at least a year prior to publication, yet why did Behn write the piece for Lucretius (second edition, 1683), and not for the Theocritus (1684)? Regardless, what we have then are two key dates: 1683 for Lucretius and 1684 for Theocritus, and the connection of Creech and the Cambridge folks.



beyond the mere celebration of nature to explore its other functions.<sup>41</sup> For example, in her poem “A Song to a Scottish Tune,” the speaker illuminates how nature can be an active participant in the union of lovers and can exist in many ways solely for their purpose:

See the Flowers how sweetly they spread,  
And each displays his coloured head,  
To make for us a fragrant Bed,  
To practise o’re new blisses...

(lines 5-8)

While the speaker points to the aesthetic qualities of the surroundings—the colorful heads of the flowers that are spread about—similar to the approach of Theocritus in the “Idylls,” nature serves as more than a mere background for human happenings. In this case, nature moves beyond a static Theocritean place of beauty to become an active influence in the conspiring of the two lovers, capable of evoking a genuine, subjective response.<sup>42</sup> The speaker suggests that the sun ignites the fire of their love and that the shade offers them protection. The sun conspires with love and seems to “bid us retire”:

The Sun itself, with love doth conspire,  
And sends abroad this ardent fire  
And kindly seems to bid us retire;  
And shade us from his Glory (lines 9-12)

Notice how the speaker strategically couches the presence and power of nature between his pleas to Phillis in an attempt to suggest that nature, too, wants Phillis to yield. The speaker’s rhetorical strategy relies upon the presence of nature as a contributor to his cause.

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<sup>41</sup> According to Thomas Rosenmeyer in *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), “Theocritus avoids the temptation of allowing nature full play...his scenery is “lightly sketched in...One of the features of Theocritus’ art is that he refuses to describe” (191).

<sup>42</sup> According to C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon in *A Handbook for Literature*. Sixth Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1992), A.O. Lovejoy found as many as sixty different meanings for “nature” in its normative functions. The word “nature,” as it is being used here, means “external nature,” referring to such objects as mountains, trees, rivers, flowers, and birds. While the treatment of nature in pastoral poetry is often conventional in character, I argue that Behn’s presentation of nature is capable of evoking a more genuine, subjective response to natural surroundings, contrary to the rather idyllic, stylized representations of nature by Theocritus and many of Behn’s contemporaries.

The speaker begins with an initial call to action for Phillis to come and love in the shady grove. He quickly moves to a description of nature, illuminating for Phillis how the flowers have acted on the lover's behalf to create a beautiful bed for their love. The Sun, too, acts in accordance with the speaker's desire ultimately to seduce Phillis. Nature is an active agent.

Having illustrated nature's conspiring forces, the speaker concludes with, "Then fairest come, and do not fear," as if to suggest that not only has he arrived at the logical conclusion that the maid should yield, but that all of nature agrees as well. The speaker and nature act in harmony here, so claims the speaker. In fact, the landscape seems to function as an extension of the speaker's own mind in carrying out the mutual goal of persuading Phillis. Thus, Behn's approach here clearly differs from that of her predecessor Theocritus. Whereas nature serves as a backdrop to the action of the "Idylls," in Behn it is often the cause of action itself—in this case, buoying the persuasiveness of the speaker's plea.

In deviating from the tradition of representing nature as backdrop to the action of the nymphs and swains, Behn promulgates a new way of looking at the pastoral landscape as natural, capable of influencing desire and fostering love. Active nature not only encourages, ignites, and protects this love, it in fact validates it. While this poem could in fact be read as a *carpe diem* argument by a male seducer, it is important to recognize that the love the poet describes in this effort is not an illicit love, a love driven by ambition, or a one-sided love; rather, the poem speaks of a new kind of love that is supported by the natural world:

The Sun itself, with love doth conspire,  
And sends abroad this ardent fire  
And kindly seems to bid us retire;  
And shade us from his Glory(lines 9-12)

The love described in this stanza, as in others of this poem, is not a hierarchical love based upon difference, but a progressive love that acknowledges the possibility of mutual passion, equal love, and perfect respect<sup>43</sup>. From the first line, the speaker points to an “improved love,” and later an “equal love” characterized by “new blisses.” Yet Behn’s own poems speak of choice, devotion and opportunity, words not often associated with seventeenth-century pastoral love pursuits. Thus in her model, which deviates from her pastoral predecessors, the natural world responds to both male and female desires, and nature provides both the place and the opportunity to improve upon the practices of love.

Behn’s pastorals incorporate influences from other poetic predecessors, such as Virgil and Spenser, who frequently used the form to address contemporary political and historical concerns. Yet unlike Virgil, who presented his experiences of civil war and political arbitration allegorically through the symbol of the (self-)exiled shepherd and the shepherd’s merry boasts and contests for women and song,<sup>44</sup> in poems such as “Silvio’s Complaint: A Song, to a Fine Scotch Tune,” Behn uses simile to challenge dominant political and sexual practices, particularly the presence of ambition in love:

...Ye Noble Youths beware,

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<sup>43</sup> The love Behn details is reminiscent of that of John Donne, who too speaks of a “new love,” absent of fear (line 18), when “an even flame two hearts did touch” (line 10) respectively, in his poems “Lover’s Infiniteness” and “Love’s Deity.”

The idea of love as mutual is also addressed in several poems in the *Covent Garden Drolery*, an edition collected by Behn, as in this unattributed poem entitled “An Epithalamium”:

There was neither Birth nor Beauty,  
 Made these years Parenthesis,  
 Fitting accidents and duty  
 Did, before deny the bliss.  
 Since they now embrace each other,  
 With a just and mutual fire,  
 May their passions never smother;  
 Or their spirits fail desire

(lines 9-16)

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth V. Young, “Aphra Behn, Gender, and Pastoral” *Studies in English Literature*. 33 (1993): 524.

Shun Ambitious powerful Tales:  
Distructive, False, and Fair,  
Like the Oceans Flattering Gales  
See how my Youth and Glories lye  
Like Blasted Flowers I'th' Spring:  
My Fame Renown and all dye,  
For wishing to be King. (lines 41-64)

Just as Virgil varies the Theocritean motifs, Behn moves beyond the limits of classical pastoral, beyond the simplicity of Theocritus and the stateliness of Virgil, to expose destructive power relations in love:

A Pox of Foolish Politicks in Love,  
A wise delay in Warr the Foe may harme:  
By Lazy Siege while you to Conquest move;  
His fiercer Beautys vanquish by a Storme...  
(“An Ode to Love,” lines 5-8)

Again, in “To my Lady Morland at Tunbridge,” Behn uses the language of Royalism and conquest to express her critique of sexual politics:

...Of how much Beauty, Cloris, dwelt in you;  
How many Slaves your Conqu'ring Eyes had won,  
And how the gazing Crowd admiring throng:  
I wish'd to see, and much a Lover grew  
Of so much Beauty, though my Rivals too.  
(lines 14-18)

Focusing predominantly on the nature of sexual relationships and their inherent inequalities, Behn concludes that love can often be potentially political. She further develops this theory of sexual politics in such poems as “The Return” and “Our Cabal,” where she argues that gender constructs that reinforce established power relationships need to be challenged:

...But Shepherd beware,  
Though a Victor you are;  
A Tyrant was never secure in his Throne;

Whilst proudly you aim  
New Conquests to gain,  
Some hard hearted Nymph may return you your own.  
(“The Return,” lines 13-18)

These poems use the pastoral form to make both a political and social statement about ambition and tyranny—a concern that was on the mind of many during this time.<sup>45</sup> By framing the topic of love within this context Behn uses the language of war and combat to address social and sexual inequalities, establishing a link between sexual practices and socioeconomic and political structures. By coupling the conquering of a nation and people with the predominantly male act of conquering in love, Behn offers a powerful comment on the dangers of a love motivated by pride and ambition. She suggests that ambition is a mark of civilization based on a masculine thirst for power and dominance. Thus for Behn, a pastoral is not just a “thing of beauty, existing only for itself and in itself,” as Virgil’s *Eclogues* were said to be, but rather a pastoral can be a recommendation, a proposition, and a new way to look at and think about social and sexual relations.

Behn’s pastorals vary further from classical tradition in that her poems often present sexual pursuits and passions in unconventional ways, including same-sex Sapphic desire and love triangles. Her pastorals often include a powerful female sexual subject, one who takes a larger and more assertive role in the poem than in the pastorals of her male contemporaries, making possible the inscription of active female desire. Behn interrogates power as a definer of identity, both male and female, and in so doing, she questions conventional gender roles and the structures of oppression they support. For example, in her pastoral “Song: The Complaint,” Behn reverses the behavioral roles played in a typical

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<sup>45</sup> According to Gardiner, frequent changes of political regime during the seventeenth century would certainly have left nearly everyone in Restoration England thinking that they had recently lived under tyranny of one sort or the other, either Puritan or Royalist (275).

pastoral love lament, making the mourning figure the “true hearted Swaine” (line 1), Amyntas, who on a river bank lies helplessly complaining of Silvia, “that false Charming Maid” (line 4).<sup>46</sup> By upsetting our expectations of the nymph as the betrayed victim, Behn not only deviates from classical traditions, but she posits new behavioral possibilities and calls into question the immutability of gender.

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<sup>46</sup> First published in *the Forc'd Marriage* in 1671, Behn's hard-hearted nymph in “The Complaint” is replicated in a poem by Mr. T.O., “The Complaint. A Song to a new Scotch Tune of Mr. Farmers,” that appears in *Miscellany, Being a Collection of Poems. By Several Hands. Together with Reflections on Morality, or Seneca Unmasqued*. (London: Printed for J. Hindmarsh, at The Golden Ball over against the Royal Ex—change in Cornhil, 1685):

I Love, I dote, I rave with pain,  
No quiet's I my mind,  
Tho ne're cou'd be a happy Swain,  
Were Sylvia less unkind.  
For when, as long her Chains I've worn,  
I ask relief from smart,  
She only gives me looks of Scorn;  
Alas 'twill break my heart...

(lines 1-8)

Janet Todd notes that this type of complaint song was a popular convention.

## Behn's Representations of the Golden Age

While Behn was influenced by the work of other pastoralists, and she was attracted to the form, in particular the myth of the Golden Age, it is difficult to define exactly what the Golden Age meant to Behn. Is the Golden Age a time of peace and tranquility, of innocence and purity before the intrusions of man and society? Is it merely a backdrop against which to articulate a critique of society? Or, does the Golden Age carry with it religious affiliations as a time prior to the fall of man, before avarice, ambition, and war? Is it an attempt to regain a lost paradise?

In this next section I argue that Behn's various uses of the Golden Age mimic its historical presence. Just as the Golden Age came to mean different things for different poets, it came to mean different things at different times for Behn: a place of sexual freedom; a time of homoerotic love; a fantasy time; a time of exploration/exploitation of new lands; a time prior to human intrusion; a satiric space, and an idyllic space. Thus taking Germaine Greer's argument that Behn creatively blends the Golden-Age topos with the State-of-Nature topos<sup>47</sup> one step further, I believe Behn amalgamates these topoi to arrive at a mythology that allows for variation and experimentation, specifically to explore the interconnectedness of desire, nature, and the social order. Thus the Golden Age for Behn is a perfect age that might someday be recovered; her portrayal is vernacular in its presentation of a Paradise; it glances backwards to Eden and forward to the promise of a heaven or a new world; and it speaks to human longings and desires.

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<sup>47</sup> Germaine Greer, "Alme n Liberate Avvezze": Aphra Behn's Version of Tasso's Golden Age" *Apha Behn (1640-1689): Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity*, ed. Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq, and Guyonne Leduc (Paris: L'Harmattan Press, 2000): 225-33.

It seems that a simple means to understanding Behn's concept of the Golden Age would be to read her poem, "The Golden Age. A Paraphrase on a Translation." Yet because this poem exists as an adaptation of the famous opening chorus from the pastoral play *Aminta* (1573), by the Italian poet Torquato Tasso, it is difficult to determine where Tasso ends and Behn begins.<sup>48</sup> The French version from which Behn worked has not been identified. Greer has pinpointed three possible sources, but her findings are still inconclusive.<sup>49</sup> From a short chorus in Act I of the *Aminta*, running a total of five thirteen-line stanzas with a three-line envoy, Behn derives 198 lines of English "Pindaric" verse on the Golden Age. Her expansion of Tasso's chorus is significant because it explores her own vision of a Golden Age while containing it within the guise of a paraphrase of a translation. Such a layering allows for both authorial distance and license. According to Dryden's translation schema, Behn's poem as a "Paraphrase on a Translation" would aptly have been described as a paraphrase, desirable because it is a combination of metaphrase and imitation, varying sometimes from nearly imitation to nearly metaphrase. It expresses the thought or sense of the original without using its exact word or line order and it is nearest to a "just translation."<sup>50</sup> As such, it allows Behn the opportunity to experiment, for as Dryden remarks, if loose paraphrase is a fault, "'tis much more pardonable than that of those who run into the other extreme of a literal and close translation" (II. 164).

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<sup>48</sup> According to Janet Todd in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992): 385, Tasso's poem was quite famous, and when Behn's version was published, English versions had been appearing for nearly a century.

<sup>49</sup> Greer cites the following three versions of Tasso's *Aminta* as possible sources that Behn may have used: *L'Aminte du Tasse, Traduite de l'Italien en Vers françois* (Paris: Chez Claude Barbin, sur le second Perron de la Sainte Chapelle, MDCLXVI), 55; *L'Aminte du Tasse, Tragicomedie Pastorale, Accommodee au Theatre François* (Paris: Augustin Courbe, 1632); *L'Amynte Pastorale Traduction Nouvelle avec les figures* (Paris: Toussaint Quinet, 1638).



While critics such as Germaine Greer, Robert Markley, and Molly Rothenberg have given this poem a considerable amount of attention,<sup>51</sup> their discussions center on Behn's variations of Tasso and do not suggest, as I do, that her revisionary moments are particularly revealing of her Golden Age philosophy and are critical to an understanding of her pastoral poems in particular. In acknowledging her variations on Tasso, we can notice certain themes and points of contestation in Behn's pastoral priorities: her desire to use the pastoral to investigate gender difference and the contemporary social ideologies and attitudes that center on women's roles and behaviors.

Divided into ten sections, Behn's "The Golden Age" begins by richly detailing a virgin earth untouched by man, complete with Natives, who "unwearied sing till Love invades" (line 29). Behn deviates from Tasso with respect to the landscape she describes, which is much more detailed than that of his version. Thus Tasso's

Nor for th' Ayre (ever calme to see)  
 Had quite exil'de the lowring Night;  
 Whilst clad in an eternall Spring  
 (No fiery hott, or self freezing)  
 The cheeks of heav'n smil'de with cleare light...  
 (lines 7-11)

becomes for Behn,

When an Eternal Spring drest ev'ry Bough,  
 And Blossoms fell, by new ones dispossesed;  
 These their kind Shade affording all below,  
 And those a Bed where all below might rest.  
 The Groves appear'd all drest with Wreaths of        Flowers,  
 And from their Leaves dropt Aromatick Showers,  
 Whose fragrant Heads in Mystick Twines above,

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<sup>50</sup> John Dryden, *Works*, ed. Sir Walter Scott as revised by George Saintsbury. 18 vols. (Edinburgh, 1882-93): I: 273. Also, see James H. Jensen, *A Glossary of John Dryden's Critical Terms* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1969).

<sup>51</sup> Robert Markley and Molly Rothenberg, "Contestations of Nature: Aphra Behn's 'The Golden Age' and the Sexualizing of Politics" *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993): 301.

Exchang'd their Sweets, and mix'd with thousand Kisses,  
 As if the willing Branches strove  
 To beautifie and shade the Grove  
 Where the young wanton Gods of Love  
 Offer their Noblest Sacrifice of Bliss.  
 Calm was the Air, no winds blew fierce and loud,  
 The Skie was dark'ned with no sullen Cloud;  
 But all the Heav'ns laugh'd with continued Light,  
 And scatter'd round their Rays serenely bright  
(lines 5-20)

These lengthened descriptions serve two purposes. First, they allow Behn the opportunity to detail a rich and active nature through the use of personification; nature is presented as a living, feeling body, complete with urges and desires (lines 9-12). Nature here nourishes innocent and tender play, music, and love; the heavens are laughing (line 19) and the flowers are kissing (line 12).

Additionally, the length of such natural descriptions intensifies the distinction she later sets up between the country and the court, making the accompanying dichotomous associations of untouched/touched, simple/complex, innocent/corrupted, powerless/powerful all the more poignant. Her descriptions create a world that supports and encourages humankind, a world where nature, the heavens, and the gods exist in perfect harmony (lines 19-25). Behn's creation of a beautiful, natural landscape untouched by humans draws the reader into a particularly enticing space, only to be disillusioned once humans intrude:

...The stubborn Plough had then,  
 Made no rude Rapes upon the Virgin Earth;  
 Who yielded of her own accord her plenteous Birth,  
 Without the Aids of men...  
(lines 31-34)

Unlike Tasso, Behn spends the first two stanzas creating a natural landscape prior to introducing in stanza three the presence of the "stubborn plough." In stacking description

upon description of the landscape, Behn builds toward the climactic moment of human intrusion. The reader is thus tempted to refer constantly to this lost world, knowing that its recovery is virtually impossible. The contrast Behn makes between the world of flowers, groves, streams, and gentle breezes and the world of wars, alarms, arbitrary rulers, and laws is so great that one cannot help but reflect upon this lost world with both nostalgia and remorse. As readers, we lose ourselves in the simplicity of the natural world Behn details. By grounding the actions of her nymphs and shepherds within such a landscape, Behn suggests the real possibility of a simplistic existence, one not hampered by war, ambition, and politics.

While Tasso hints at a similar intrusion with the introduction of the concept “Honour,” he does not dramatize the drastic contrast between country and city, man and nature. Tasso points to several landscape particulars, “...for with milke the rivers ranne,/And hunny dropt from ev’ry tree” (lines 2-3), yet his descriptions are reminiscent of an idyllic space and function differently from Behn’s presentation of a more naturalized landscape, “...when ev’ry Purling Stream/Ran undisturbed and clear” (1-2). Tasso intermixes these idealized landscape particulars with anti-war sentiment, commenting about the power of honor and cruel laws, as in stanzas two and three. Thus he does not provide readers with the opportunity to lose themselves within a natural space, as Behn does. Furthermore, his fairyland world, where “cheeks of heaven” smile (line 11) and geniis dance in silver streams (lines 27-8), seems capable of accommodating only an idealized vision of golden bliss. In contrast, Behn harkens back to Virgil’s *Georgics* with the image of the plough, encouraging the reader not only to postulate the practice of

husbandry and rustic occupations, but to contemplate man's unique relationship to nature. Tasso's poem does not encourage the reader to consider such possibilities.

As a paraphraser of Tasso, Behn is also interested in the concept of honor. Although Greer suggests that "Behn complicates Tasso's argument by implicating other agencies in the suppression of spontaneous pleasure—war, monarchy, religion, ambition, right, property, and commerce—before she accuses 'Honor'" (231), Behn ultimately takes issue with the idea of honor as that which,

put'st our words that should be free  
Into a set Formality.  
Thou base Debaucher of the generous heart,  
That teachest all our Looks and Actions Art;  
What Love design'd a sacred Gift,  
What Nature made to be possest,  
Mistaken Honour, made a Theft....

(lines 138-144)

Behn makes honor an issue specific to women. She departs from Tasso by repeatedly calling into question female honor, such as in stanzas six and seven that build toward a climactic stanza eight, where she unleashes her diatribe against the effects of honor on women:

Of cursed Honour! Thou who first didst damn,  
A woman to the Sin of shame;  
Honour! That rob'st us of our Gust,  
Honour! That hindred mankind first...

(lines 117-20)

Preoccupied with the theme, she returns to a discussion of honor in the direct address to Sylvia in the final stanza:

But Sylvia when your Beauties fade,  
When the fresh Roses on your Cheeks shall die,  
Like Flowers that wither in the Shade,  
Eternally they will forgotten lye  
And no kind Spring their sweetness will supply.

When Snow shall on those lovely Tresses lye  
And your fair Eyes no more shall give us pain,  
But shoot their pointless Darts in vain.  
What will your duller honour signifie?  
Go boast it then! And see what numerous Store  
Of lovers, will your Ruin'd Shrine Adore.  
Then let us Sylvia yet be wise,  
And the Gay hasty minutes prize...

(lines 184-96)

The speaker here, a male seducer, calls to our attention the absurdity involved in attaching such significance to female honor. What is the point of reserve if beauty fades and reputations give way with the passage of time? In this *carpe diem* moment, the speaker quickly follows his question with a command for Sylvia to seize the day and prize the “hasty minutes” of life. Yet we should be suspicious of Behn’s narrator here, for ultimately it is in his best interest for Sylvia to lose her honor. Could Behn be saying something else here, too? Perhaps that woman’s honor is a barrier of sorts to male sexuality? It is interesting that Behn chooses to challenge the cultural construction of female honor from a male perspective. Yet ultimately, her focus on honor throughout the poem, in particular female honor, reputation, and integrity, suggests first a deliberate move away from Tasso, but also a conscious foregrounding of the issue that preoccupies much of Behn’s poetry—the constraints honor places on women.

This particular moment in Behn’s revision of Tasso has generated comment among scholars who differ on their interpretation of Behn’s departure from her source.<sup>52</sup> As Greer has argued, Behn transforms Tasso’s sex-play into a seduction scene, but the implications

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<sup>52</sup> Germaine Greer notes, “Those who wish to argue that in ‘The Golden Age’ Behn gives a feminist twist to libertine discourse have also to consider the fact that where Tasso keeps his sexual encounters strictly reciprocal...Behn turns his madrigalesque celebration of spontaneous polymorphous sex-play into a spectacular seduction scene”(232). Elizabeth Young suggests that this revision renders the poem a denunciation of the concept of honor as Behn argues that honor represses natural feeling, particularly in women (539).

are complex. I agree with Greer. I think line 117 and following is unexpected. The voice of the poem drastically changes from that of chorus to seducer, from the voice of many to the voice of one, and in this sense, the poem moves from ungendered to gendered. Here Behn's discussion of country and court is transformed into the untutored, heartfelt outpourings of a male seducer in the form of a charged address, aimed at Sylvia. This point represents an opportunity for Behn to extend her discussion of the oppositional structures of country/city to a discussion of man and woman. Behn takes the reader from paradise to reality and marks the presence of honor as she goes.

Here Behn also addresses the very real dilemma women faced concerning the effects of time on beauty and reflects upon how this consequently affects a woman's honor (lines 184-91). In earlier lines, Behn focuses on nature's capacity for renewal and regeneration in opposition to the irreversible aging process of (wo)man. Behn presents beauty and honor as being inextricably connected in women, and she aligns such constructs with the passage of time in order to call into question both their power and presence in the lives of women. Greer concludes that we cannot know if such changes from Tasso represent Behn's own doing any more than we can be sure that the poem's argument represents Behn's own conviction, until "we have her immediate source and know what kind of a commission she had been given" (232). Yet I believe that in transforming Tasso's "Live we in love for our lives hours/Hast on to death, that all at length devours" into a seduction scene focusing on a renunciation of honor in the name of sexual liberation, Behn makes both a contribution to extreme libertinism as well as a powerful comment on the suffocating effects of honor on women. Once the speaker commands honor to "Be gone! And let the Golden age again" (line 166), the voice of the Maid is released: "Let the young

wishing Maid confess,/what all your Arts would keep conceal'd" (lines 168-69). The speaker acknowledges the power honor holds to silence women. Thus, a return to the Golden Age consequently signals for Behn a liberation of woman.

Significantly, for Behn the Golden Age is a time of sexual liberation and freedom of speech, a time when lovers "thus uncontroul'd did meet,/Thus all their Joyes and Vows of Love repeat:/Joyes which were everlasting, ever new/and every Vow inviolably true..." (lines 105-8). It is a time without a gendered social structure, where both young maids and swains are encouraged to seize the day and to live for the moment, "Let the young wishing Maid confess,/ What all your Arts would keep conceal'd:" (lines 169-70) and "Let the Peaceful Swain love on;/The swift pac'd hours of life soon steal away" (lines 175-76). Behn encourages us to visualize a return to a Golden Age as a return to ultimate freedom for both sexes, especially for women, where honor is not an inhibiting force, where beauty does not fade, and where man and woman are free to live and love as equals in an eternal spring.

One final revision, albeit small, that Behn makes of Tasso's chorus carries significant weight with respect to Behn's ideas about women and religion. Like Tasso, Behn incorporates the harmless, poison-less, venom-less snake in her Golden Age vision. Yet interestingly, unlike Tasso, Behn couples the snake with the nymph in an intermingling of "innocent play." Tasso begins:

O Happy Age of Gold, happy' houres;  
For with milk the rivers ranne,  
And hunny dropt from ev'ry tree;  
Nor that the Earth bore fruits and flowers,  
Without the toyle or care of Man,  
And serpents were from poison free...

(lines 1-6)

This is revised by Behn in the following manner:

...The Roses fill'd with Morning Dew;  
Bent down their loaded heads,  
T'Adorn the careless Shepherds Grassy Beds  
While still young opening Buds each moment grew  
And those withered, drest his shaded Couch a new'  
Beneath who's boughs the Snakes securely dwelt,  
Not doing harm, nor harm from others felt;  
With whom the Nymphs did Innocently play,  
No spiteful Venom in the wantons lay;  
But to the touch were Soft, and to the sight were Gay  
(lines 39-48)

It is tempting here to suggest that Behn purposely couples the snake with the woman figure in an attempt to debunk the Christian myth that figures the snake's condition as the direct result of Eve's impulse to sin. What differentiates Behn's Golden Age from the biblical Garden of Eden is the absence of sin and the absence of other forms of authority. In this respect, Behn exonerates woman from blame by presenting her as an innocent figure, existing side-by-side with nature's creatures in this prelapsarian moment. Thus in synthesizing biblical allegory with her own imaginative revision, she cleverly relieves woman of the burden of sin.<sup>53</sup> Behn disorients the reader's conventional expectations of the snake as "a sign of the wily and dangerous nature of masculine power, which seduces women to reveal themselves and render their social and sexual authority for the false promise of pleasure and gratification" (Young, 541). This scene, in which the nymphs "innocently play," suggests the possibility that a way back to a state prior to repression might be found and that "humankind is not irrevocably alienated from its desires" (Markley and Rothenberg, 303) by woman's originary sin.

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<sup>53</sup> Behn sexualizes this allegorical scene with the introduction of the harmless soft snake, an image that carries phallic implications and one that is replayed by Behn in "The Disappointment," "...Finding beneath the Verdant Leaves a Snake" (line 110); and in "To the Fair Clarinda who made love to me, Imagin'd more than Woman": "...A Snake lies hid beneath the Fragrant Leaves" (line 17).



## Behn's Representations of Love and Relationships

While an investigation of Behn's classical influences is instrumental in helping to make some assessments of how she maneuvers within the pastoral genre, ultimately Behn cleverly reworks the pastoral to produce a new kind of verse. In a poem entitled "Song to a Scottish Tune," Behn acknowledges and prioritizes female desire within a pastoral setting. The speaker begins by speaking of Jemmy, "the finest Swain/That ever yet a flock had drove" (line 3). Adhering initially to the pastoral conventions of female innocence and male triumph, the song centers on Jemmy's desire. The repetition of the pronoun "he" makes explicit an emphasis on male desire. Jemmy invites the speaker to sing songs, feed her flock, and delight in a pastoral ideal that operates in favor of Jemmy's desire "To conquer any princely Maid" (line 23). However, once Jemmy is called to war, the speaker's tone changes drastically from Jemmy-centered to self-centered. The third stanza reads:

But now for *Jemmy* must I mourn,  
Who to the Wars must go,  
His Sheep-hook to a Sword must turn;  
Alass! What shall I do.  
His Bag-pipe into war-like sounds,  
Must now exchanged be,  
Instead of Garlands, fearfull Wounds:  
Then what becomes of me.

(lines 25-32)

Here, Behn activates female desire. She reverses the usual focus of the genre from boastful gallant to maiden through an interesting gender transformation and an acoustical shift. The "ou" of "sounds" and "wounds" replaces the "a" of "bag-pipe" and "garlands," thus transforming the music of pleasure to sounds of war. The shift from the soft "a" to the "ow" and "oo" of sounds and wounds further emphasizes the speaker's pain, creating a

kind of wail of loss. The shepherdess's definition of herself is undermined, altered, even lost here with the change in Jemmy's identity from pastoral shepherd to warrior. This transformation leaves her with both a lack of purpose and fear for her future. The emphasis here is on her loss, one that she has no control over, as evidenced by the repetitions of "must." Thus, regardless of the fact that Jemmy must exchange his pasture for a battlefield, the speaker's concerns revolve around the inevitable absence of her sexual pleasure: "Alass! What shall I do?...Then what becomes of me" (lines 28, 32). The usually canceled female body is articulated by Behn, hence negating the supremacy of male desire and representing the female body as a sexual body with urges.

In fact, the voice in the song speaks entirely from the point of view of the shepherdess, a figure who adopts the authority to comment both on her lover and her predicament. With ease, she begins to chronicle Jemmy's sexual history from the point at which he "first began to Love" (line 1). Moreover, she goes on to tell of his abilities as a lover, perhaps in part to illustrate his sexual appeal, but most certainly as a means of excusing her own involvement with him: "I could not say him nay" (line 8). Jemmy is reduced to his sexuality, and as such, he becomes the object of the female gaze. Yet Behn does not merely reverse the notion of the female as spectacle in an attempt to subjugate the male figure; she complicates this idea by using it as a platform from which to explore her speaker's own sexuality. Thus in narrating Jemmy's sexual history, the speaker is forced to assess her own sexuality, specifically her involvement with him.<sup>54</sup> The speaker discovers that in noticing Jemmy, her "freedome threw a way," and in "finding sweets in [his] every

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<sup>54</sup> See Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), in which he argues, "...passion especially on the part of the lover chanting his love, always hovers on the borderline of the narcissistic" (78).

smart,” she cannot resist him (lines 6-7). Thus the gaze is two-fold in that the speaker simultaneously watches her lover and reflects upon herself as the beloved.

Throughout the song, the speaker continually attempts to displace the focus from her own sexuality to Jemmy’s by making him the first subject of every line. The effect of prioritizing Jemmy’s moves seems to be a way to keep the speaker on course. After all, this is a poem about Jemmy. There is a deliberate hesitation on the part of the speaker to make herself and her desire the subject of the poem. Yet undeniably, underneath the Jemmy-talk is a history of the speaker’s own sexuality as she moves from heart to genitals, and from want to need. For the maiden, her story is one of purpose and blame. Jemmy acts with intent to delight her, as the speaker makes perfectly clear. Thus in part the maid can renounce responsibility for her intrigue with Jemmy because her “freedom” was thrown away in his presence. In this respect, she is a victim of circumstances, wishing Jemmy “more to blame” (line 16).

The introduction of these conventional topoi, in particular the language of virginity, innocence, sacrifice, and victimization, calls attention to conventional literary representations of love and resistance where woman is often defined as a sacrificial victim. I would argue, however, that the speaker’s resistance is what Zeitz and Thoms describe as “mock resistance” (504), which functions as a convention of behavior in the pastoral world Behn describes. Female desire is not employed to support a male fantasy of sexual irresistibility. Rather, Behn offers an inversion of convention in order to expose the figure of the sexualized female.

At its core, the pastoral is a heteronormative system, in which the swains are “innocent and tender,” and the shepherds are shown “not for their Poverty, but their

Pleasure” (Congleton, 207). The characterization of shepherd and swain records a specific gender dynamic based on difference; thus, the pastoral describes and draws a particular life where such characters must uphold certain roles in order to be proper. Their leisure, solitude, and innocent manners are expressed within a heterosexual system that dictates what is and is not acceptable. The shepherds and nymphs must embody the highest degree of innocent sincerity by relying on decorum as the primary principle in determining their language. As such, the style, language, and thematic content of pastorals must be in keeping with the appropriate rules of the genre. In this poem, however, Behn reveals the maiden’s process of negotiation as she weighs her desire for Jemmy against adhering to the social codes that women must uphold. By illuminating the social forces behind the conventions, Behn encourages her reader to acknowledge that such acts of negotiation were essential for women. The female lover in this poem is inconvenienced by the swain’s eventual absence, as indicated by her repeated question about how she will be affected by the loss of the lover, as well as by her displaced focus from “other” to “self.” In addition, Behn’s reworking of the romance tradition moves love from a spiritualized love to one of female sexual desire.

Behn moves even further in this poem beyond the classical pastoral tradition where passions are not to admit reasoning or deep enquiry. In fact, falling in love for this maid does not entail a loss of rationality. In what is undoubtedly a breach of decorum, the final stanza reveals the maid wrestling with conflicting emotions and desires when war intrudes into this idyllic pastoral. Behn marks this struggle with the use of both the semicolon and colon that slow down the action of the poem and announce the maid’s selfish considerations, “Alass! what shall I do?” and “Then what becomes of me” Thus, when

considering Jemmy's move from sheep hook to sword, from the sounds of bagpipes to those of slaughter, from garlands to gaping wounds, the maid mourns. Yet, on rationalizing the loss of Jemmy, the maid repeatedly returns to a consideration of *her* predicament by questioning where the site of her future pleasure will be. Behn subjects the image of the mourning maid to an unusual reversal. Thus, ultimately the only person the maid mourns is herself. In this manner, the poem transcends the pastoral, envisioning a world of female rationality, sexuality, and assessment.

## Behn's Subversive Treatment of Gender and Sexuality

In another pastoral poem, "On a Juniper-Tree, cut down to make Busks," Behn features an intermingling of lovers that transcends a binary model and encourages an interchangeability of partners in a triangle of love-making. Narrated from the perspective of the tree, the poem radically twists and exploits the conventions of the pastoral setting through this personification. Behn uses the tree both as a convention of the Arcadian landscape and as a tool to suggest a variation on the pastoral love duet. The tree is the site of sexual pleasure:

Upon my Root she lean'd her head,  
And where I grew, he made their Bed,  
(lines 26-27)

But the tree is also an active participant in the sexual threesome:

And every aiding Bough I bent  
So low, as sometimes had the blisse  
To rob the Shepherd of a kiss.  
(lines 34-36)

The relationship between nature, in the form of the juniper tree, and human sexuality, in the form of the young lovers, is consistent with Behn's use of the pastoral, as nature contrives with the lovers to accomplish the seduction of Cloris. This move is similar to the one Behn makes in "A Song to a Scottish Tune," where nature conspires with the speaker in the seduction of Phillis.

Yet Behn is not content in this poem to leave the tree outside the action as an isolated observer who merely supports and encourages the seduction. Rather, as Young suggests, the juniper tree becomes a participant in the lovers' intercourse (526). By blurring the boundaries between the worlds of man and nature, Behn invites us to visualize

this almost surreal moment of erotic bliss. Simply put, Behn asks us to picture an exchange between a shepherd, a nymph, and a tree, and to accept such an exchange as both normal and possible in her pastoral world. Her comingling of worlds suggests far-reaching imaginative possibilities that move beyond the simple world of the conventional pastoral.

In including the tree as a third lover, a sexual voyeur, Behn reworks the pastoral that traditionally invokes the woman as spectacle. Here, both the male and female lovers are subjected to the attention of the gaze as the tree narrates, play-by-play, their love-making:

I saw 'em kindle to desire,  
Whilst with soft sighs they blew the fire:  
Saw the approaches of their joy,  
He growing more fierce, and she less Coy,  
Saw how they mingled melting Rays,  
Exchanging Love a thousand ways.  
(lines 41-46)

Behn's repetition of the word "saw" emphasizes the tree's role as a voyeur who is aroused and stimulated by the passion of the lovers:

A thousand times my Covert bless,  
That did secure their Happiness:  
Their Gratitude to every Tree  
They pay, but most to happy me.  
(lines 78-81)

Interestingly, the desire the tree expresses in relation to the lovers is not a one-sided love. It does not discriminate between the swain and nymph by showing affection for one over the other. In fact, neither do the lovers, who, according to the tree's report, welcome the presence of the tree and include it in their exchange of affections:

The Shepherdess my Bark carest,  
Whilst he my Root, Love's Pillow, kist.

(lines 82-83)

The tree's participation in the caresses of both the nymph and the swain is evidence of bodily activity that is significant both to Behn's reinterpretation of the pastoral couple and to the notion of same-sex desire. According to Young, Behn disorients the readers in their expectations of clear cut seductions of shepherdesses by shepherds. "All three seduce and are seduced, act and are acted upon, create and are created" (528). In blurring the issue of the tree's individual gender identity into its larger, social identity, its function dominates its form. The tree identifies itself by its relation to the young lovers, and in a sense, it is dependent on them. Yet the tree recognizes that the lovers will not have such an exciting encounter with it again:

Since I must shelter them no more;  
And if before my Joyes were such,  
In having heard, and seen too much,  
My Grief must be as great and high,  
When all abandon'd I shall be,  
Doom'd to a silent Destinie.  
No more the Charming strife to hear,  
The shepherds Vows, the Virgins fear:  
No more a joyful looker on,  
Whilst Loves soft Battel's lost and won.

(lines 85-94)

Behn emphasizes the devastation in losing one's capacity to be an agent of action.<sup>55</sup> This is similar to the maid in the previous poem missing Jemmy, who wonders what is to become of her in the absence of her lover.

The gender of the tree is ambiguous, allowing Behn to complicate her love equation even further. When described in terms such as "Triumphant stood,/The Pride and Glory of

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<sup>55</sup> As Elizabeth Young suggests, the tree is thus relegated to a tertiary role, and it grieves at the recognition that it will no longer be able to kiss and be kissed (528).



the Wood” (lines 1-2) whose boughs and fruit possess a “Nature to Excel” (line 5), the tree appears to be traditionally male. Yet after this characterization, the tree is compared to “bashful Virgins” (line 9), while its “verdant Branches all the year/Did an Eternal Beauty wear” (lines 13-14). By refusing to delineate the gender of the tree, Behn suggests a pan-erotic or pan-sexual desire once the tree is invited into the love-making. Desire, as Behn writes it in this poem, does not simply follow a heterosexual plot, but is complicated by homosexual/bi-sexual and trans-species desire. By couching the ménage a trios in an idyllic pastoral setting and using the language of heterosexual desire, Behn eloquently makes the final suggestion of homoeroticism.

Behn’s use of the pastoral for the expression of specifically female-female desire is best illustrated in her poem, “To the Fair Clarinda, who Made Love to Me, Imagin’d More than Woman.” While this poem has received a considerable amount of attention as Behn’s creation of a hermaphroditic ideal, I here focus attention on the poem’s form and content, specifically how same-sex desire among the heroine figures plays out in relation to pastoral conventions. The poem, a complex presentation of the relationship between two women, or as Paul Salzman suggests, “Behn’s unfixing of sexual categories” (111), is readily accommodated by the pastoral mode. From the beginning of the poem, the speaker challenges pastoral convention by calling into question the traditional title for the beloved as the “Fair lovely Maid,” and suggests that this title is “Too weak, too Feminine” for *her* lover (lines 1-2). By doing so, the speaker moves beyond the constraints of the tradition in renaming the Maid of the pastoral the “lovely Charming Youth,” a name that she feels more “approaches Truth” (lines 3-4). This is a critical step for Behn’s innovation. She not only debunks convention and offers her rationale for doing so, but she equips her reader

with the specific language and titles necessary to appreciate such an invention. Her heroine is a different kind of heroine, as she makes known from the start.

Yet surpassing the constraints of the traditional pastoral in order to negotiate a space from which to express same-sex desire is not without effort. Trying to suggest a new heroine figure while transcending the form creates a continual struggle for the speaker throughout the poem, as indicated by its mention at three points in these twenty-three lines. The speaker is constantly reminded of the form by which she measures her “reinvention.”<sup>56</sup> The form “giv’st [the lovers] pain,” against which she “struggle[s] but in vain” (line 9). Yet she claims that the form allows her to love while keeping this love innocent and free of crime:

For sure no Crime with thee we can commit;  
Or if we shou’d—thy Form excuses it.  
(lines 14-15)

The speaker considers, if only for a minute, the possibility of Sapphic desire, and she concludes, as if an afterthought as illustrated by the use of the dash, that the form could actually excuse such a love. Behn uses the language of blame and crime to articulate same-sex desire, yet ultimately the pastoral acts as the site from which she can simultaneously suggest and “excuse” same-sex desire.<sup>57</sup> The pastoral tradition, which presumes heterosexual love and female innocence, protects and disguises true feeling, allowing the speaker the liberty to express homoerotic love “without Blushes” (line 7).

As Carol Barash notes, this love poem to another woman is “more clearly encoded in terms of male and female oppositions than any of Behn’s heterosexual love poems”

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<sup>56</sup> The word “form” here could also refer to the beloved’s body and her very being.

<sup>57</sup> According to Arlene Stiebel, the masking, in this case the form, “allows the audience to go away satisfied that no breach of decorum has been made. It permits us to deny, dismiss or marginalize that which we do not wish to acknowledge” (162).

(*Teaching*, 174). I agree with Barash's assessment, particularly in light of the language the speaker uses to describe her lover and the binary relationship she sets up between the sexes:

Thou beauteous Wonder of a different kind,  
Soft Cloris with the dear Alexis join'd;  
When e'r the Manly part of thee, wou'd plead  
Thou tempts us with the Image of the Maid,  
While we the noblest Passions do extend  
The Love to Hermes, Aphrodite the Friend.

(lines 18-23)

The language and characterizations here are clearly rooted in difference. Cloris is set in opposition with Alexis, man is set against maid, and Hermes opposes Aphrodite. Yet in blurring, or blending male and female, that is if Clarinda is both maid and youth, both Hermes and Aphrodite, then as Barash suggests, men and women can no longer be understood as oppositionally nymph and swain (*Teaching*, 174). I am not convinced that Behn is attempting to dispel the differences between the sexes entirely, as Barash contends. Rather, I think her masquerading of gender throughout this poem is both a testament to her search for other representations of a female self and an authorization and validation of alternative female roles and practices. Thus, rather than exploiting the union of the lovers and their experiences into a private, idealized state as a fundamental element of heterosexual love poetry, Behn makes possible in this poem a union of same-sex bodies in opposition to a heterosexual union.

In her poem "The Return," Behn uses her heroine figure to tackle the Puritan ideology of self-denial and the masculinizing of desire. She pictures a heroine who is in control of both herself and her shepherd. She attacks sexual and political repression by using the language of political tyranny to suggest that gender constructs that reinforce established power fail to address women's needs and desires. In so doing, she

demonstrates how sexual and political authority overlap. What is fascinating about this poem is its powerful female voice that speaks with such authority and expertise as she warns the shepherd that nothing is ever secure in love:

Amyntas whilst you  
Have an Art to subdue,  
And can conquer a Heart with a Look or a Smile,  
You Pityless grow,  
And no Faith will allow;  
'Tis the Glory you seek when you rifle the Spoil.

Your soft warring Eyes,  
When prepar'd for the Prize,  
Can laugh at the Aids of my feeble Disdain;  
You can humble the Foe,  
And soon make her to know  
Tho' she arms her with Pride, her Efforts are but vain.

But Shepherd beware,  
Though a Victor you are;  
A Tyrant was never secure in his Throne;  
Whilst proudly you aim  
New Conquests to gain,  
Some hard hearted Nymph may return you your  
own.

(lines 1-18)

Although this shepherd has an “Art to subdue,/ And can conquer a Heart with a Look or a Smile” (lines 2-3), the nymph suggests that while historically he has been successful in his love conquests and buoyed by the idea of “the Glory you seek when you rifle the Spoil,” he may one day encounter a nymph who also upholds a cavalier approach to love and is capable of exposing him and his strategy. The tone of this poem, as spoken by an aggressive nymph figure, is reminiscent of “A Song,” taken from a collection of poems written by Ephelia entitled, *Female Poems on Several Occasions* (1679). Within this effort, the nymph figure similarly confronts her unfaithful swain who has chosen to court her rival:

You wrong me Strephon, when you say,  
I'me Jelous or Severe,  
Did I not see you Kiss and Play  
With all you came a neer?  
Say, did I ever Chide for this,  
Or cast one Jealous Eye  
On the bold Nymphs, that snatch'd my Bliss  
While I stood wishing by?...

But when you seriously Address,  
With all your winning Charms,  
Unto a Servile Shepherdess,  
I'll throw you from my Arms:  
I'de rather chuse you shou'd make Love  
To every Face you see,  
Then Mopsa's dull Admirer prove,  
And let Her Rival me.

The nymphs of these two poems have been wronged by their lovers, and they are not afraid to confront them. Both Behn and Ephelia exhibit a mastery over the language of power, war, and conquest, and they know how to use this language to suggest imaginative alternatives to the innocent nymph figure. These heroines are cognizant of the libertine practices of love. Behn and her contemporary Ephelia detail for Amyntas and Strephon respectively their strategies and tactics. Additionally, in exploring the structures of supremacy and submission, Behn and Ephelia expose the interconnected structures of hierarchy and dominance that characterize most relations between men and women. Both poets ground their critique of repression in traditional representations of the sexes as a means of disclosing the contradictions within such gender constructions. Yet these poets use the conventions of pastoral to critique and dismantle these very structures, in particular when Behn's heroine warns her shepherd to beware since women can be libertines, too.

Finally, Behn goes to whatever length necessary to revise the Arcadian heroine, even if it means recreating the shepherd. For example, she adopts the tradition of the

shepherd as teacher. The shepherd of the Middle Ages often served the prophetic function of expounding upon the pastoral ethical system by declaring it as superior to the court.<sup>58</sup> The shepherd stood as the mouthpiece of wisdom, whose primary function was to teach, instructing on various topics from love to the hardships associated with pastoral life. Behn uses this device and also reinvents it. The shepherd becomes a tool to investigate matters of subjectivity, of sexuality, and of the gender ideology represented and maintained by pastoral convention, as illustrated in “A Song to a Scottish Tune”:<sup>59</sup>

Come my Phillis, let us improve,  
Both our joy of equal love  
Whilst we in yonder shady Grove,  
Count Minutes by or kisses.  
See the Flowrs how sweetly they spread,  
And each displayes his coloured head,  
To make for us a fragrant Bed,  
To practise o’re new blisses.  
The Sun it self, with love does conspire,  
And sends abroad his ardent fire,  
And kindly seems to bid us retire;  
And shade us from his Glory.  
Then fairest come, and do not fear,  
All that your Slave desires there,  
Is Phillis, what you love to hear  
Him say; that he does adore you.

(lines 1-16)

Behn’s shepherd is equipped with prophetic wisdom. He guides his listener through the poem using the language of persuasion in an attempt to seduce his Phillis.<sup>60</sup> He occasionally relies upon the typical language of a pastoral love pursuit, that of refusal and

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<sup>58</sup> Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1977): 73.

<sup>59</sup> Behn provided this song three times: in a 4-line version, a 32-line version, and a 48-line version. Todd uses the longer, earlier version, but Behn omitted a stanza in her *Poems on Several Occasions*.

<sup>60</sup> While Andrew Marvell’s speaker in “To His Coy Mistress” also uses the language of persuasion to seduce his mistress, (a convention common to many pastoralists of the period), Marvell’s lover is physical and masculine, at war with time and the metaphysical notions of love, unlike Behn’s swain who speaks of a love based on mutuality and respect, where time is not an issue.

blame: “Ah! Phillis, if you love me so,/As you persuaded me long ago,/Why should you now refuse to do,/What you so oft have vow’d me...” (lines 17-20). But he is unique in his attempt to introduce the concepts of equality and respect when speaking about the sex he hopes to attain.

Behn’s shepherd proposes a different kind of love than convention dictates, one that serves to satisfy the desires of both the nymph and shepherd. Lines one and two of this poem, “Come my Phillis, let us improve,/Both our joy of equal love,” are revolutionary on two counts. First, these lines serve to acknowledge Phillis as both a sexual being and a critical participant in the loving. The shepherd calls for mutual participation and partnership as if to suggest that improving the love is only possible once each member plays an equal and active role. Second, the shepherd seeks improvement in love. He calls for change by reinventing the language in which to speak of his pastoral love, moving from the “I” of traditional pastoral into talk of “us” and “we,” as he attempts to foster a sense of mutuality and reciprocity. In addition, he recasts himself from the figure of the shepherd to that of the slave, “Then fairest come, and do not fear,/All that your Slave desires there,/is Phillis...” (lines 13-15), in an attempt to acknowledge the power of desire to enslave the male, thus reversing the traditional figure of woman as other and object. The issue here is one of power, and for this moment, Behn’s shepherd willingly renounces his, only to bestow it upon the nymph. What results is an empowered nymph who is free to articulate specific desires that she wants fulfilled—in this case, the desire to be the sole object of her shepherd’s attention.

Finally, Behn’s shepherd seems almost aware of himself as a reinvention as he defines himself in juxtaposition to his beloved:

Did I e're your bounty abuse,  
Or [your] severest commands refuse:  
Nay rather choose to languish then to lose  
The perfect respect I ow'd to you,  
Yet Phillis, some reward is due,  
To him who dayly does renew  
The passion which he has for you  
[And] is a faithfull Lover

(lines 21-28)

While certainly there are glimpses of traditional pastoral in which love to the shepherd is cast in terms of reward and opportunity, the shepherd also introduces a measure of equality. For example, he complies with demands (line 22), does not languish (line 23), recognizes the importance of respect (line 24), consciously makes efforts to renew the passion in his relationship (lines 26-7), and he is faithful, open, and honest. Behn revises the figure of the shepherd to suggest a new and improved kind of nymph. In learning who the shepherd is, we learn what the nymph wants.



## **Private Sentiments and Public Complaints in the Shady Spaces of Anne Finch**

- I. Introduction
- II. Situating the Self: Anne Finch's Shade
- III. Rethinking Finch and the Beatus Vir Tradition
- IV. Finch's "Retreat"
- V. Finch and Friendship: Playing with the Pastoral
- VI. Finch's Nymph: The Feeling Subject
- VII. Pastoral Marriage: From Swain to Husband

## Introduction

Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720), was a prolific writer whose oeuvre includes songs, pastorals, dialogues, Pindaric odes, tales, beast fables, hymns, didactic compositions, biblical paraphrases, verse epistles, and satires. Of the 233 known poems she wrote, however, close to one hundred are pastorals or contain substantial, significant pastoral elements. Unlike the pastoral poetry of Behn and Singer Rowe, Finch's poems have received a considerable amount of contemporary scholarly attention. This interest was perhaps sparked by William Wordsworth. He praised Finch for her fresh attentiveness to descriptive nature writing and he admired her work. He noted in response to reading "A Nocturnal Reverie," that "the eye of the Poet had been steadily fixed upon [her] object" and that her "feelings had urged her to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination" ("Essay Supplementary to the Preface" 1815, 173). His attempt to align Finch with the Romantic poets in turn incited a host of scholars to take up the issue of whether or not Finch's poetry typifies an Augustan or Romantic sensibility.<sup>61</sup>

Although Finch, like the other women writers examined in this study, skillfully employs a range of conventions that resist historical and literary categories, I believe it is possible to read Finch as a pastoral poet. The pastoral appears throughout the entirety of

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<sup>61</sup> Scholars such as Germaine Greer, Ann Messenger, Katharine Rogers, Charles Hinnant, Jennifer Keith, and Barbara McGovern are just a few who engage in this controversy and position Finch at various points along an historical poetic continuum that ranges from Augustan to Romantic. For Greer and Rogers, Finch is an Augustan poet who upholds the principles of symmetry, order, and balance, and who is prophetic of Thomson, Young, and Gray, rather than of Wordsworth (1). Conversely, Ann Messenger suggests that Finch is able to echo Herrick and to anticipate Wordsworth in a single poem. Finch's Cavalier-like itemization of rural delights and her Romantic-like inspired morality show her inventiveness in adapting two traditions to her own purposes (50). Jennifer Keith claims that Finch's poetics are neither Augustan nor Romantic because of Finch's view of the relationship between the poet and object. For example, where the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Keats often pursue an identification between subject and object that is based on a dynamics of difference, wherein the poet is gendered male and the object is gendered female, Finch's poetics undo this binary to discover a shared condition between poet and object (10). Keith's work offers a detailed explanation of Finch's poetics as a poetics of replacement.

her career, and it dominates her poetic oeuvre. Through close textual analyses of several of her pastoral poems, I will illustrate that Finch's poetry requires the kind of detailed scrutiny that has been given to the pastorals of her contemporaries, by affirming the importance of her contributions to the genre. Specifically, I will isolate the poems that illustrate Finch's power as a pastoralist in order to highlight her ability to manipulate the pastoral form for her own poetical purposes. Finch's pastorals offer a powerful revision of the pastoral tradition. She flirts with "romantic" ideals with an emphasis on feelings and genuine imagination while maintaining an Augustan sense of decorum and precision. She writes in the usual Augustan verse forms, particularly heroic couplets, and yet her pastorals are characterized by a personal sincerity that is unparalleled by those of her contemporaries.

I will begin the chapter by illuminating components of Finch's social and literary position in order to illustrate how she imaginatively uses the shady spaces of the pastoral to resolve some of the implicit tensions of the plight of the female author. I will go on in the chapter to argue that while Finch has received considerable attention for her poems of retirement and has been categorized as a follower of the *beatus vir* tradition, specific deviations in both content and form place her outside of this tradition. I will illustrate that the pastoral, and the recesses of the shade in particular, provide a free space for Finch to write and experiment, a space where she is able to blur poetic elements from various traditions. I will conclude the chapter with the point that Finch shows a wide range of poetic skill and thematic variety in her pastorals, from the gentle sensitivity exhibited in her treatment of friendship and love, to the complex reversal and play of gender dynamics between the nymph and swain, to the suggestion of same sex desire, and the revision of the swain figure as husband, not suitor.

### **Situating the Self: Anne Finch's Shade**

While Finch repeatedly identifies with her literary sisters from Sappho to Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn, her literary and social position distinguish her from the other women of this study. Specifically her company at court with such men as Sir George Etherege, Sir Charles Sackville, Sir Charles Sedley and William Wycherley, along with her associations with Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift set her apart from Behn and Singer Rowe. Finch's friendship with Swift inspired him to write the following remarks on the death of her husband's nephew in 1712:

Poor Lord Winchilsea is dead, to my great grief.  
He was an 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.”  
(I, 55)

Swift also wrote a poem “To the Honourable Mrs. Finch (Since Countess of Winchilsea), Under the Name of Ardelia,” in which Apollo is taken by the beautiful Ardelia and attempts to seduce her. According to Barbara McGovern, this poem had a significant impact on Finch's publishing career.<sup>62</sup>

Finch also maintained a relationship with Alexander Pope, who not only admired her work, but published it and wrote a poem in tribute to her entitled: “IMPROMPTU, To Lady WINCHILSEA. Occasion'd by four Satyrical Verses on Women-wits, in the RAPE of the LOCK.” According to the poem, Pope showed Finch his manuscript for *The Rape of*

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<sup>62</sup> In Barbara Jeanne McGovern, “The Poetry of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea: Tradition and the Individual Female Talent” (Dissertation Abstracts International, Ann Arbor, MI, 1988), she notes, “. . .it is not difficult to imagine the effect such a persuasive argument might have had upon the hesitant Anne. Having one of the foremost writers of the age publish a highly complimentary poem urging her to publish, must have done much to help Anne eventually overcome her reluctance”(29).

*the Lock*, and a minor dispute developed over several lines of the poem in which Finch appears to have taken up the position on behalf of women writers. In response, Pope composed the following lines, measuring Finch's literary accomplishments against those of other female poets:

In vain you boast poetic names of yore,  
And cite those Sapphos we admire no more:  
Fate doom'd the fall of every female wit,  
But doom'd it then, when first Ardelia writ.  
Of all examples by the world confess'd,  
I knew Ardelia could not quote the best.

(lines 1-6)

In response to these lines, Finch wrote "The Answer to Pope's Impromptu," in which she gently advises Pope: "Yet sooth the Ladies I advise" (line 33). Later in her poem "To Mr. Pope" she cavalierly suggests, "But gently drop this counsel in your ear...Allure with tender verse the female race..." (lines 20, 25). This exchange and her address to him as "Alexander" make clear that a cordial relationship existed between the two.

In addition to possessing these literary associations, Finch positions herself within the camp of poets in her poem "To a Fellow Scribbler" when she states, "Prittee, friend, that hedge behold:/When all we rhiming fools grow old" (lines 1-2). She is in playful imaginary dialogue with other poets such as John Denham, Philip Sydney, and Abraham Cowley, and she references their works with ease as in "Upon the Death of Sir William Twisden" and "To the Honorable the Lady Worsley at Longleate."

While Finch did maintain these social and literary associations and friendships, it is clear that she felt a certain degree of exclusion from poetic authority.<sup>63</sup> This feeling of

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<sup>63</sup> Although self-disparagement was a common pose for writers, such remarks are littered throughout her works: "Each Woman has her weaknesse; mind [sic] indeed/Is still to write tho' hopelesses to succeed" ("The Apology," lines 15-6), "But far too weak, are these imperfect Lines,/(Th' unkill'd attempts of an inferiour Muse" ("Upon the Death of Sir William Twisden," lines 182-3), "In borrow'd caracters disguis'd I

exclusion is significant to this particular study because Finch uses the pastoral to articulate the plight of the female author, specifically finding contentment in rooting her poetry in the dark recesses of the shade.<sup>64</sup> In a poem entitled, “On Myselfe,” Finch reveals the unique struggles of the female poet who is not dependent upon the praise of others, but who rather is satisfied with her own merit. She confesses that although “designed” as the “weaker kinde,” she can exist on her own, “on my selfe can live,” and that she ultimately finds contentment in the shade of retirement:

Good Heav'n, I thank thee, since it was design'd  
I shou'd be fram'd, but of the weaker kinde,  
That yet, my Soul, is rescu'd from the Love  
Of all those Trifles, which their Passions move.

Pleasures, and Praise, and Plenty have with me  
But their just value. If allo'd they be,  
Freely, and thankfully as much I tast,  
As will not reason, or Religion wast.  
If they're deny'd, I on my selfe can Live,  
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.

(“On Myselfe”)

Finch further articulates the struggles implicit in her dual positions as both woman and author and her efforts to alleviate these tensions by positioning her work on the

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write/ Nor dare my hand or meaner stile expose” (“To the Right Honorable The Lady C. Tufton, lines 10-11), and “compos'd by no Eminent Hand” (from the bi-line to “A Poem for the Birth-Day of the Right Honorable The Lady Catharine Tufton.”

<sup>64</sup> Scholars such as Jennifer Keith have commented on Finch’s feelings of exclusion from poetic authority, but to date none claims that she uses the pastoral to resolve these feelings. Keith contends that Finch’s poetic self takes on the role of what is normally objectified in the poetic tradition: the bird. She uses her identification with the bird to defend her authority to write by emphasizing the narrow range of her ability and poetic territory while calling on the bird’s classical lyric associations as a trope of inspiration. See Jennifer Keith, “The Poetics of Anne Finch” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 38 no.3, (1998): 465-80.

periphery of poetic achievement in “The Introduction,” a poem written for the manuscript collection of her works:

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, 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.  
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.  
They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;  
Good breeding, fassion, dancing, dressing, play  
Are the accomplishments we shou'd desire;  
To write, or read, or think, or to enquire  
Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,  
And interrupt the Conquests of our prime;  
Whilst the dull manage, of a servile house  
Is held by some, our outmost art, and use.

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.  
On that glad day, on which the Ark return'd,  
The holy pledge, for which the Land had mourn'd,  
The joyfull Tribes, attend it 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.

Loe! The young Poet, after Gods own heart  
By Him inspired, and taught the Muses Art,  
Return'd from Conquest, a bright Chorus meets,  
That sing his slayn ten thousand in the streets.  
In such loud numbers they his acts declare,  
Proclaim the wonders, of his early war,  
That Saul upon the vast applause does frown,  
And feels, its mighty thunder shake the Crown.  
What, can the threat'n'd Judgment now prolong?  
Half of the Kingdom is already gone;

The fairest half, whose influence guides the rest,  
Have David's Empire, o're their hearts confess't.

A Woman here, leads fainting Israel on,  
She fights, she wins, she triumphs 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.  
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 designed;  
And if some one, wou'd Soar above the rest,  
With warmer fancy, and ambition press't,  
So strong, th' opposing faction still appears,  
The hopes to thrive, can ne're outweigh the fears,

Be caution'd then my Muse, and still retir'd;  
Nor be dispis'd, aiming to be admir'd;  
Conscious of wants, still with contracted wing,  
To some few friends, and to thy sorrows sing;  
For groves of Lawrell, thou wert never meant;  
Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there content.

Again, Finch roots herself in the shade as the space both conducive and necessary to her artistic expression. While Finch ultimately attributes the failure of women not to nature but to faulty education, and she suggests that few women have the ability to “Soar above the rest,/ With warmer fancy, and ambition press't” (lines 55-56), having considered her position as a woman poet and fearing the strength of “th' opposing faction,” she claims that she must be satisfied with a “contracted wing.” However, unlike Katherine Rogers, who claims that Finch’s “confidence falters when she considers the present state of women and comes to a depressing conclusion” (xiv), I believe that Finch acknowledges her position as an outsider in order to publicly declare her authorial self and to sanction a space from which to write. Finch does not surrender her ambitions as a poet to “groves of Lawrell,” but rather claims this space as her own, and in so doing discovers the freedom to unleash



her creative imagination. She recognizes that her position as a woman places her at the outskirts of poetic authority, yet she does not resign. Rather than putting down the pen, she simply decides to proceed with caution:

Be caution'd then my Muse, and still retir'd;  
Nor be dispis'd, aiming to be admir'd;  
Conscious of wants, still with contracted wing,  
To some few friends, and to thy sorrows sing;  
For groves of Lawrell, thou wert never meant;  
Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there content. (lines 59-64).

These six concluding lines of the poem define the parameters of Finch's poetic career and her pastoral poems in particular. They illuminate her position as a woman poet cognizant of being relegated to the sidelines. Yet more importantly, these lines define and shape both the nature and scope of her audience and poetic intentions. She claims to write not as a spokesperson for her age, but rather for her friends and family. She further claims not to seek public commendation, but rather private approval. (Yet it is hard to ignore that much of her work is grounded in the social and political setting of her day, and that her poetic stance of personal poet often lends itself to public utterance, from morally instructive verse to political satire). However, for the purposes of this study, these lines, most importantly, articulate the unique space of the dark shades, which prove to be the space in which Finch finds the freedom to author much of her work and self:

Let some shade, or your large Pallace be  
Our place of meeting, love, and liberty;  
To Thoughts, and words, and all endearments free.

("Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia," lines 5-7)

While it is tempting to correlate the production of Finch's pastoral with her move to the country and her stay at Kent, doing so fails to acknowledge that such poems appear

throughout the entirety of her literary production. Thus contrary to Jean Mallinson's assessment that life away from court offered her as a woman poet a "formal structure in which she could express in poetry her sense of herself as an outsider, an eccentric,"<sup>65</sup> her first poems, although written at the court, still speak of a shady retreat. For example, in her poem "Upon the Death of King James the Second," Finch claims a retreat space from which she speaks upon the death of the King:

Whilst for my self like solitary men  
Devoted only to the Pen  
I but a safe Retreat amidst Thee Crave  
Below th' ambitious World and just above my Grave.  
(lines 1-4)

Rooting herself in the shade liberates her from the masculine world that she associates with the poetry of men. She is free to blur the systematic distinctions that Enlightenment writers sought; situations are not black and white for Finch, but gray in this fluid space of the shade. Hence the creation of this space allows her the flexibility to explore unconventional behavior and religious ideals as she does in her poem "The Atheist and the Acorn." Moreover, in the shade she expresses progressive attitudes for women, as in her poems "The Prodigy" and "The Prevalence of Custom." She plays with gender and critiques politics and the social relations between men and women in "The Unequal Fetters" and "A Letter to Dafnis" and in doing so, she divorces herself from the norms, tastes, and assumptions that shape poetic discourses of Enlightenment, and pastoral poetry in particular. Thus, in the shade Finch both locates the freedom to write and be a poet and discovers the voice to do so: "Let some shade...be our place of meeting, love, and liberty/To thoughts, and words, and all endearments free" ("Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia,"

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<sup>65</sup> Jean Mallinson, "Anne Finch: A Woman Poet and the Tradition," *Gender at Work: Four Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ann Messenger (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990):60.

lines 5-6). In the shade, thoughts are not repressed but rather take shape in the form of words.<sup>66</sup> The shade manifests itself in so many of Finch's poems that it would be correct to suggest that she cannot escape it, and as a controlling component of her pastoral poetry it is present at every turn.<sup>67</sup> Finch basks in the shade, finding liberation through retreat:

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.

("The Petition for an Absolute Retreat," lines 1-7).

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<sup>66</sup> Ruth Salvaggio's article, "Anne Finch Placed and Displaced," in *Early Women Writers 1600-1720*, provides a solid starting point for a discussion of Finch's concept of shade. Salvaggio suggests that Finch's desire for shade is both a shattering of light and Enlightenment, and a disruption of structures long associated with the systems of man. She suggests that this vaguely defined, profoundly feminine space does not simply oppose the light of man or the darkness associated with woman, but rather it splits that duality from within. Shade is not the opposite of light, rather it subverts the opposition of light and darkness, and consequently the opposition between masculine and feminine. Thus the shade that Anne Finch sought became a configuration of woman that could not be accommodated within the structures of Enlightenment systems. Shade was not simply a retreat, but the process of a radical displacement that was hers as a woman writer.

<sup>67</sup> It is noteworthy that the shade also appears in her occasional verse such as in her poem "A Description of one of the Pieces of Tapistry at Long-Leat" which states: "And here, in tinctur'd Wool we now behold/Correctly follow'd in each Shade, and Fold" (lines 16-7). Her poems on animals, such as "The Bird and the Arras," also mentions the shade: "By neer resemblance see that Bird betray'd/Who takes the well wrought Arras for a shade" (lines 1-2). The shade further appears in her court poetry in "To the Honorable the Lady Worsley at Long-leate, and even in her laments and funerary verse such as "Upon the Death of Sir William Twisden."

## Rethinking Finch and the *Beatus Vir* Tradition

Prior to an investigation of Finch's pastoral poems, and the characteristics that compose her retreat space of the shade, we should note that, historically, Finch has been positioned by scholars in the *beatus vir* tradition,<sup>68</sup> with Abraham Cowley posited as acting as her model. However, Finch in fact deviates from the *beatus vir* through three major variations of the tradition; thus narrowly defining her as a follower of the *beatus vir* is incorrect as it over-simplifies the complexity of her work and negates the uniqueness of her poetry. I will highlight these changes in order to suggest that much of Finch's poetry combines elements of pastoral, an appreciation of nature, and retirement themes, and that the pastoral readily accommodates these variations more than does the tradition of the *beatus vir*.

While the poetry of retirement is a common mode of the seventeenth century, it exclusively explores a contrast between the affectation and corruption of court and city, and the calm beauty of country life. The character who pervades this space is characterized by inner peace, self-mastery, freedom from slavery to the passions, mental independence, and emotional equilibrium. The poetry of retirement was often considered to be a Royalist mode, and in spite of its individualism and enthusiasm for rural retreat, it was frequently deemed anti-Puritan.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> It is tempting to align Finch with the *beatus vir* tradition and consequently draw a link between her poetry and her retirement to the country as a consequence of her political loyalties. One could argue that her retreat to the country was in part a strategy for coping with political defeat after the parliamentary deposition of James II. Attached to the court of Charles II and residing at St. James's Palace as Maid of Honor to Mary of Modena, second wife of the Duke of York, who three years later would become King James II, Finch was exiled from the court when her husband Heneage Finch refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to William III in 1689. As a result, she spent the last thirty-two years of her life in their Kent estate, where she produced translations, imitations, and occasional verses, as well as lyrical and polemical poems.

<sup>69</sup> See Maren-Sofie Rostvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*. vol. 1 (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).

Finch's thematic variety moves beyond the prescriptives of the *beatus vir* tradition, and thus, while she frequently explores a contrast between the corruption of the court and city and the calm beauty of country life, she uses this conventional opposition as a framework to discuss other topics. Hence we see retirement themes and pastoral elements in her poems on friendship, commendation, and even on the mourning of a dead king. In "From the Muses, at Parnassus," Finch discusses politics in a pastoral setting. Moreover, she uses the pastoral to explore depression in "To the Honorable The Lady Worsley at Longleate," and "On Affliction." Birthday celebrations, such as "A Poem for the Birthday of the Right Honorable The Lady Catharine Tufton," are situated in the pastoral, as are discussions of love in "To Mr. F. Now Earl of W." and greed and wealth in "The Shepherd and the Calm." It is not uncommon to find rivers weeping, poets dreaming, and thoughtless flocks meandering about, all within the span of one pastoral poem, and in this case a death lament, "Upon the Death of Sir William Twisden."

Another point of departure from the *beatus vir* tradition, with its ordered spaces, is Finch's feminine-centered approach, which transmogrifies the pastoral space into an ambiguous scene characterized by activity and restlessness, one suited for the purposes of exploration and query. Finch replaces the contemplative man in nature, a predominant feature of the *beatus vir* tradition, with a female voice of inquiry who frequently tackles issues of gender, politics, and culture. In her "Enquiry After Peace," the poet wrestles with the notion of inner peace and tranquility. Flitting from one place to the next, "Flying swift from place to place" (line 22), the speaker is incapable of locating peace and placing it within a particular context. Specifically she challenges the *beatus vir* tradition by wondering whether peace can be found "in some retired Plain..." (line 9):

Peace! Where art thou to be found?  
 Where, in all the spacious Round,  
 May thy footsteps be pursu'd?  
 Where may thy calm Seats be view'd?  
 On some Mountain dost thou lie,  
 Serenely near the ambient Sky,  
 Smiling at the Clouds below,  
 Where rough Storms and Tempests grow?  
 Or, in some retired Plain,  
 Undisturb'd dost thou remain?  
 Where no angry Whirlwinds pass,  
 Where no Floods oppress the Grass.  
 High above, or deep below,  
 Fain I thy Retreat wou'd know.  
 Fain I thee *alone* wou'd find,  
 Balm to my o'er-weary'd Mind.  
 Since what here the World enjoys,  
 Or our Passions most employs,  
 Peace opposes, or destroys.  
 Pleasure's a tumultuous thing,  
 Busy still, and still on Wing;  
 Flying swift, from place to place,  
 Darting from each beauteous Face;  
 From each strongly mingled Bowl  
 Through th'inflam'd and restless Soul.  
 Sov'reign Pow'r who fondly craves,  
 But himself to Pomp enslaves;  
 Stands the Envy of Mankind,  
 Peace, in vain, attempts to find.  
 Thirst of Wealth no Quiet knows,  
 But near the Death-bed fiercer grows;  
 Wounding Men with secret Stings,  
 War who not discreetly shuns,  
 Thorough Life the Gauntlet runs.  
 Swords, and Pikes, and Waves, and Flames,  
 Each their Stroke against him aims.  
*Love* (if such a thing there be)  
 Is all Despair, or Extasie.  
*Poetry's* the feav'rish Fit,  
 Th'o'erflowing of unbounded Wit.

This is a clear moment of departure from the *beatus vir* tradition. There is a particular energy and almost frantic nervousness that runs throughout this poem as the speaker

searches to locate a sense of tranquility and calm. Jumping from politics to ambition, thence to nature, to death, to war, and to love, the speaker struggles “in vain” to quench the fires of a “restless Soul.” Her enquiry never yields peace, and as a result, she is left in a state of confusion and restlessness.

Finch in fact occasionally disparages the entire notion of solitude, a major component of the *beatus vir*. In “A Pastoral Dialogue,” Dorinda prefers the company of swains to solitude and considers time alone, wasted time:

Nymph! With thee I here wou'd stay,  
But have heard, that on this Day,  
Near those Beeches, scarce in view,  
All the Swains some Mirth pursue:  
To whose meeting now I haste.  
Solitude do's Life but waste.

(lines 11-16)

Finch's retreat space is often thoroughly peopled. Men, women, and the company of friends are central to the scene, and not Nature in the abstract. Thus the *beatus vir* tradition, which prioritizes an abstract meditative and solitary state, is dismissed in favor of the company of others.<sup>70</sup> Finch desires not solitude but companionship:

Give me there (since Heaven has shown  
It was not Good to be alone)  
A Partner suited to my Mind,  
Solitary, pleas'd and kind;  
Who, partially, may something see  
Preferr'd to all the World in me;  
Slighting, by my humble Side,  
Fame and Splendor, Wealth and Pride. (104-111)

In the following stanzas, she reiterates her desire for companionship within her retreat space:

Friendship still has ben design'd,

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<sup>70</sup> As McGovern notes, “it is human beings that provide [for Finch] the spiritual continuity and depth to one's life, even in a rustic retreat”(165).

The Support of Human-kind;  
The safe Delight, the useful Bliss,  
The next World's Happiness, and this.  
Give then, O indulgent Fate!  
Give a Friend in that Retreat  
(Tho' withdrawn from all the rest)  
Still a Clue, to reach my Breast.  
Let a Friend be still convey'd  
Thro' those Windings, and that Shade! (192-200)

And in yet another poem entitled "Some Reflections," Finch further contests the notion of a retreat space as a solitary space. In this pastoral dialogue, Teresa, in pursuit of Ardelia, says, "Hither, Ardelia, I your steps persue,/No solitude shou'd e're exclude a friend" (lines 4-5). Finch consistently envisions her retreat space among company, albeit lovers or friends, finding satisfaction, liberation, and freedom in couplings and unions.



## Finch's "Retreat"

Investigating the landscapes of Finch's pastoral retreats serves to illuminate her pastoral priorities: her desire to use the pastoral to investigate gender difference and the contemporary social ideologies and attitudes that center on women's roles and behaviors. In "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat," Finch adopts the common theme of a celebration of a virtuous retreat in nature set in opposition to the space of the court. Yet an analysis of this poem reveals that Finch's retreat space is more complicated than the typical country space.<sup>71</sup>

As mentioned earlier, carving out a space from which to write was a struggle for Finch; thus it is significant that the poem in which she describes her pastoral retreat space is in fact an appeal and a formal request for change, a "petition." With each new stanza, the speaker implores and almost pleads in favor of a changed existence in this Edenic space, where woman is relieved of all burdens and constraints and is allowed utter freedom in the silence of a private retreat. As a petition, the poem has both an agenda and purpose—change—in this case, change in the form, content, and use of the pastoral. Finch uses the pastoral as a means of formalizing what she opposes by making known her version of an absolute retreat space. The speaker gathers up everything that gives her joy in life and she brings it with her, leaving behind that which she disparages.<sup>72</sup> Thus her petition is in part a celebration of what she most values and simultaneously a Jacobite rejection of a

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<sup>71</sup> Finch, like Behn, wrote a poem describing the Golden Age from Tasso's *Aminta*. However, I believe that "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat" better represents her pastoral landscapes. Consequently, I use this poem to illustrate her pastoral priorities. In her version of Tasso's "The Golden Age," however, Finch does prioritize the idea of innocence and pure love where "nor harmless freedom was deny'd."

<sup>72</sup> In this pastoral space, the speaker seeks silence, wholesome fare, a clean table, and freedom to wander about without boundaries. She seeks carelessness, warm clothes, youth, a partner/friend, security, peace, rest, and a clear, contemplative mind free from roving thoughts. According to the poem, this space exists in opposition to the space of man and society, where news, crowds, noise, ambition, hate, rage, and jealousy reign.

world of violence and treachery. Retreat for Finch is perceived as representing a world and form of community, alternative to that of the court, where life is pure, women are free, and joys are humble:

No Intruders thither come!  
Who visit, but to be from home;  
None who their vain Moments pass,  
Only studious of their Glass,  
News, that charm to listning Ears;  
That false Alarm to Hopes and Fears;  
That common Theme for every Fop,  
From the Statesman to the shop,  
In those Coverts ne'er be spread,  
Of who's Deceas'd, or who's to Wed,  
Be no Tidings thither brought,  
But Silent, as a Midnight Thought,  
Where the World may ne'er invade,  
Be those Windings, and that Shade (lines 8-21).

A common feature of Finch's pastoral space is its fluidity, and Finch frequently summons up a landscape of weeping clouds and rivers, where motifs are freely borrowed from other poets in order to create this kind of fluid space. Ironically, this recurring verse and verse variation, a labyrinthine description of the windings and the shade, actually hinge together the conglomeration of features present in the poem. Finch's retreat space is characterized by movement, thus making it difficult to locate. For example, evidence of movement is figured throughout the poem. Her retreat exists "mongst Paths so lost.../That the World may ne'er invade," where "sweet Zephyrs fly/With their Motions may comply;/Gently waving to express/Unaffected Carelessness" (68-71). It is a place where "Falling Jasmin Sheds" and "Gales" and "Winds" blow about the gardens. Flowers grow, intermix, and fly (lines 90-1), and "Garlands dropt agen" (line 92). "Whirlwinds" and "Breezes" and "Gusts" of movement are all about. Even time is moving, "Spent the swiftly flying time" (line 118), and so is the speaker, who wanders through the shade, "Springing

wheresoe'er I stray'd,/Thro' those Windings and that Shade" (lines 46-7). The changes in perspective from a figurative sense to a direct address at the climax of the poem at lines 159 and following further contribute to its fluid feel.

The fluidity of Finch's pastoral landscape works to her advantage as it allows Finch the freedom and space to articulate a host of desires and progressive ideas. She is not confined by the space, but rather encouraged to express herself in an environment that moves and winds about. The flexibility of this less structured space easily accommodates the articulation of a multiplicity of desires that are not confined by the form of the poem. For example, a fluid pastoral space allows for more authorial freedom and distance, and subsequently less authorial responsibility and accountability. What is uttered in this space exists as a fleeting moment and not a permanent statement as it is quickly glossed over by the movement of the poem.

Yet upon close investigation, among the movement of this space, several constants are at play. As fluid and dreamy as this space is, here the speaker experiences her "unshaken Liberty," a quality that distinguishes her poem from that with which it is frequently analogized, Andrew Marvell's "The Garden." Furthermore, unlike the abstract and meditative world of Marvell, Finch's retreat space is set in the natural world. It is a realistic space that is marked by its liberating qualities; thus it is sweet in the sense of pure, but it is absolute, meaning free:

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. (lines 1-7)

Finch makes several contrasts between freedom and constraint, and this tension between society and solitude, between male and female, and between wildness and restraint actually sustains the poem. For example, the breezes blow and the springs are rising, yet the speaker is free “From all roving Thoughts” (line 260) and finds comfort in the silence of “a Midnight Thought” (19).<sup>73</sup> The space is in movement, and yet it is grounded by the recurring suggestion of the windings and the shade. It is a free space, and yet the “Trees so high” provide both a protective barrier and refuge to preserve her “unshaken Liberty.”

A third characteristic feature of Finch’s pastoral space is that it is a feminine space that reveals the woman in the poet. The very configuration of shade and wandering and wavering can be read as feminine, and the poet makes it clear that her freedom consists solely in the fact that no men are near. Her retreat space is a place where she is free from domestic duty; where she is afforded “a Table spread without my Care;” where cleanliness and wholesome fare are readily provided, “All within my easie Reach.” Every aspect of the society of ladies is described in detail, from the clothes they wear, “For my Garments; let them be/ What may with the Time agree” (lines 48-9), and the diet of which they partake, “then give me there/Only plain, and wholesome Fare,” to how they occupy their time, “Spent the swiftly flying Time,/Spent their own, and Nature’s Prime,/In Love” (lines 118-20). She rebels or petitions against the opinion that the “dull manage of a servile

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<sup>73</sup> The emphasis on silence seems to be particularly important in this poem. The speaker divorces herself from the mental clutter and noise of the world to experience simple silence. She details in stanza two all of the variations of noise that can distract and prevent one from clear, cogent thoughts, starting in line eight and running until line nineteen, at which point the caesura breaks the momentum of the poem and forces the reader to take pause on the words “But Silent.” Interestingly, what the poet is silencing is the news of fops and statesmen. Thus it is possible to conclude that this silence serves both to free the poet’s mind from distraction, and to silence the male voice. Specifically, the silence frees her from man’s poetic voice and his world and moves her into a space that displays all the markings of woman.

house” was believed by some to be “our outmost art, and use” by evoking and rejecting the context of high society. Rather her retreat space is a place absent of female frivolity, where dress is modest and perfumes have no part.

Finch’s pastoral invention, the drama between Arminda and Ardelia, exists as the climax of this poem. Moving the reader from the society of the forest to the society of women in a fusion of disparate images, Finch draws the reader into the world of nature by carrying us along with the movement of the River that “slides away,/ To encrease the boundless Sea”(lines 130-31). Adhering to the pastoral convention of detailing the features of the forest, Finch moves to a discussion of the passage of time in order to suggest that nature, like woman, is its victim: “Rivell’d the distorted Trunk,/Sapless Limbs all bent, and shrunk,/Sadly does the Time presage,/Of our too near approaching Age” (lines 148-51). The emblematic description of the forest reveals Ardelia as a withered vine, who lies “blasted by a Storm of Fate...Fall’n, neglected, lost, forgot” (lines 160-62) in a dark oblivion until Arminda comes to revive her and make her “anew.”<sup>74</sup> There is a moment of resurrection when the withered vine is made anew and discovers bliss and happiness in the love of Arminda’s friendship:

So the sad Ardelia lay;  
Blasted by a Storm of Fate,  
Felt, thro’ all the British State;  
Fall’n, neglected, lost, forgot,  
Dark oblivion all her Lot;  
Faded till Arminda’s Love,

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<sup>74</sup> Although the identification of woman with the garden is conventional courtly love iconography, here in the context of friendship there exist certain spiritual overtones. The “breast,” perhaps the soul or inner self, leads her through the windings and the shade. As Messenger suggests, “The Petition” “provides a kind of topography or anatomy of the ideal life in its completeness. The time spent in idyllic retirement is to be improved moment by moment in the contemplation of nature for ‘Thoughts of Pleasure, and of Use’”(65). Thus like George Herbert and Henry Vaughn, Finch uses the natural environment to provide emblematic images of spiritual instruction. Finch wrote other poems that indicate spiritual sentiments through the use of an extended analogy, for example in “On Affliction,” “Life’s Progress,” “The Change,” and “The Decision of Fortune.”

(Guided by the Pow'rs above)  
Warm'd anew her dropping Heart,  
And Life diffus'd thro' every Park;  
Mixing Words, in wise Discourse,  
Of such Weight and wond'rous Force,  
As could all her Sorrows charm,  
And transitory Ills disarm;  
Chearing the delightful Day,  
When dispos'd to be more Gay,  
With Wit, from an unmeasured Store,  
To Woman ne'er allos'd befor.  
What Nature, or refining Art,  
All that Fortune cou'd impart,  
Heaven did to Arminda send;  
Then gave her for Ardelia's Friend:  
To her Cares the Cordial drop,  
Which else had overflow'd the Cup.

(lines 159-81)

She who was once oppressed by anguish now finds safety and freedom within “The Next World’s Happiness, and this” (line 195). She discovers the security needed to experience absolute freedom in the company of her partner, “where, may I remain secure” (line 202), within this pastoral space.

## Finch and Friendship: Playing with the Pastoral

The convention of pastoral friendship is seen in the works of two of Finch's immediate literary predecessors, Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn, in whose works Platonic and/or Sapphic love is celebrated and friends are addressed by pseudonyms and pastoral sobriquets. Specifically, a relationship between friendship poems and retreat poetry exists. Scholars, such as Hilda Smith in her text *Reason's Disciples*, explore the connection between female friendship poems and the incipient feminist theme of the desire for escape from the world.<sup>75</sup> The corollary between friendship and retreat is made by Finch in several poems, including "A Petition for an Absolute Retreat," "On Lady Cartret Drest Like a Shepherdess at Count Volira's Ball," "Ardelia to Melancholy," "Friendship Between Ardelia and Ephelia," a "Dialogue Between Teresa and Ardelia," and "The Cautious Lovers." Finch adapts the pastoral to pay tribute to her friendships with women, and her distinctive talent and point of view add a feminine voice to an otherwise masculine tradition. By challenging gender dynamics through a reversal of the nymph and swain figures; by making women and their desires the subject of her verse; and by identifying with rather than objectifying her subject, she manipulates the literary traditions of the pastoral for the nurturing of her own individual female talent. In fact, she uses friendship as a means of reconciling the pastoral dichotomy between nature and art, and in doing so she not only challenges convention, but she creates an entirely woman-centered pastoral poetry.

For Finch, friendship has many meanings. She couples the concept with "devotion" in an epistle to Mrs. Randolph, in which she claims that "friendship, like devotion clears

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<sup>75</sup> See Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 155-56.

the mind” (line 39). She boasts of friendship’s powers in her poem upon the death of her sister, “To My Sister Ogle, December 31, 1688,” and envisions an improved friendship with her in heaven, “The height of friendship to improve;/Tis’ worth our pains, and fears to dye.”<sup>76</sup> Friendship is an aid to a melancholic heart, as seen in “Ardelia to Melancholy,” where the poet claims, “Friendship, I to my heart have laid,/Friendship th’ applauded sov’rain aid” (lines 15-16). It is later described in the same poem as a “charm” and a “triumph.” Friendship is safety; it is a delight; it is a support system: “Friendship still has been design’d,/The Support of Human-kind;/The safe Delight the useful Bliss/The next World’s Happiness, and this” (“Petition,” lines 192-95). Friendship seems to occur best in the country, for in the city, “Friendship can but have/the few spare hours, which meaner pleasures leave” (“Ardelia’s Answer to Ephelia,” lines 3-4). And the betrayal of friendship seen in “Caesar and Brutus,” is the ultimate act of falsity and shame.

Yet, ultimately, Finch struggles to define the concept of friendship, as in her poem “Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia.” In attempting to define “friendship,” she challenges the Augustan notion of representation. She revises the structure of power

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<sup>76</sup> Finch also uses the pastoral and the idea of friendship to voice anxieties and religious insecurities in “Some Reflections: In a Dialogue Between Teresa and Ardelia.” Ardelia expresses her concerns to her friend Teresa in the following stanzas:

How, I my God, and his just laws adore,  
 How I have serv’d him, with my early years,  
 How I have lov’d his Name, and fear’d his Pow’r,  
 Wittnesse his Temples, where my falling teares,  
 Have follow’d still my faults, and usher’d in my fears.

But oh! This God, the Glorious Architect  
 Of this fair world, of this large Globe we see,  
 Seems those who trust him most, most to neglect,  
 Else my Teresa, else, how could itt be,  
 That all his storms attend, and tempests fall on me.

In response, Teresa attempts to assure Ardelia by illuminating God’s almightiness. Through genuine emotion, concern, and struggle, Teresa successfully alleviates Ardelia’s fears, all carried out by Finch through the use of friendship and the pastoral dialogue.



between the poet and that which she wishes to represent by identifying with rather than objectifying her subject. For example, Ephelia asks her friend Ardelia to explain “What Friendship is” since the concept and experience of friendship cannot be defined, Ardelia tries to explain the concept of friendship in this way:

‘Tis to share all Joy and Grief;  
‘Tis to lend all due Relief  
From the Tongue, the Heart, the Hand;  
‘Tis to mortgage House and Land;  
For a Friend be sold a Slave;  
‘Tis to die upon a Grave,  
If a Friend therein do lie.(lines 7-13)

Unsatisfied with this explanation since “This has all been said before” (line 17), Ephelia enquires if this is the best Ardelia can do: “Can Ardelia say no more?” (line 18). Unable to represent the concept of “friendship” in language, Ardelia falls back on an identification with Ephelia, concluding that “Words indeed no more can shew:/But ‘tis to love, as I love you” (lines 19-20). Here, the subject attempts to stand in the position of the object. The abstraction “friendship” is never truly defined; rather, it resists representation in language. Thus the poet is forced to use language to point toward an experience through her identification with it. The poet shares the position of that which she wishes to represent through an identification on an emotional level.

Like Behn, and Singer Rowe, Finch blurs the boundaries between friendship and same-sex desire. It is difficult to ignore Finch’s subversion of traditional female roles and her dismantling of the power relations of erotic expression. For example, Finch frequently expresses a love between herself and other women. In a “Friendship Between Ardelia and Ephelia,” she defines this love in the highest terms. In “An Epistle. From Ardelia To Mrs. Randolph,” she begins by calling upon Lesbian Sapphos as a means of establishing the

starting point of a lineage of women poets. She moves on to mention Orinda, only to suggest that her subject's verses are superior. From there, Finch humbles herself as standing inferior to the work of her subject, Mrs. Randolph, before expressing her desire:

Might I the parallel yet more improve,  
And gain as high a Station in your Love,  
Then shou'd my Pen (directed by my heart)  
Make gratefull Nature, speak the words of Art,  
Since Friendship, like Devotion clears the mind...(lines 35-9)

While the speaker expresses clear moments of devotion to Mrs. Randolph, "Nor, lett itt to your Verse, objected be,/That itt has stoop'd so low, to find out me,/Since a mean subject greater skill requires" (lines 19-21), these sentiments are elevated to feelings of love:

I proudly bear that of her glorious Friend,  
Who though not equaling her lofty Witt,  
Th' occasion was, of what so well she writt.  
Might I the parallel yet more improve,  
And gain as high a Station in your Love,  
Then shou'd my Pen (directed by my heart)  
Make gratefull Nature, speak the words of Art,  
Since Friendship, like Devotion clears the mind,  
Where every thought, is heighten'd and refin'd.  
(lines 32-40)

The language of friendship is eloquently blurred with the language of love, making it difficult to determine the precise nature of their bond. While this love is not spoken of in specifically erotic terms, the iconography of the phallic pen and the effect of a love that "heightens" and "refines" moves beyond the parameters of friendship into new territory, where "the Love, which that of Women did surpasse" (line 45).

In "The Cautious Lovers," Finch exposes the devastating effects of love where "hearts confus'dly stray;/Where Few do hit, whilst Thousands miss." In this pastoral addressed to "Silvia," the speaker opens with a plea for her to leave the world and come live in seclusion:

Silvia, let's from the Croud retire;  
For, What to you and me  
(Who but each other do desire)  
Is all that here we see?

Apart we'll live, tho' not alone;  
For, who alone can call  
Those, who in Desarts live with One,  
If in that One they've All?

(lines 1-8)

This typical pastoral invocation is followed by five stanzas detailing the consequences of a love that is not mutual. Finch speaks of infidelity, inconstancy, and the dangers of idolatry in love, and she contrasts these ideas with the notion of mutuality and reciprocity. The pastoral allows Finch to express her feelings on love without violating any rules of decorum, and yet one cannot help but notice that there is a certain ambiguity with respect to the speaker's gender in the first six stanzas of the poem and hence the possibility for a subversive reading.

Prior to this study, the poem has received considerable attention as a poem about two lovers, in which Finch feels at liberty to instruct, advise, and comment on the current state of love. Scholars have pointed to the corrective intent of her poem, which is made clear in this pastoral fiction through its authoritative tone and a message that speaks against the vagaries of love in early eighteenth-century English society.<sup>77</sup> Yet it is hard to ignore the possibility of certain transgressive moments due to the fact that the gender of the speaker is not made known until line twenty-eight, and even then it is still ambiguous: "No Goddess, You, but Woman are,/ And I no more than Man." While the speaker adopts the persona of a male at line twenty-eight, the initial stanzas allow for an alternative reading.

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<sup>77</sup> See Jean Mallinson, "Anne Finch: A Woman Poet and the Tradition," *Gender at Work: Four Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ann Messenger (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990): 50.

For example, the title of the poem, the “cautious” lovers, immediately alerts the reader that these lovers have something to fear, and while the fear is explained in the ninth stanza as the fear of infidelity in love, Finch’s “shadowed language of erotic ellipses,”<sup>78</sup> in stanzas one through seven, allows for moments of possible transgression. Immediately following the forceful invocation to retire to the country, the lovers’ desires for one another are couched in a parenthetical phrase. One wonders if the parenthesis suggests an afterthought, or if in fact it represents a cryptic utterance that holds greater significance. Either way, the juxtaposition of a forceful declaration followed by a parenthesis is a jarring moment and causes pause. The concluding line of the first stanza, “Is all that here we see?,” serves further to suggest the possibility of a subversive reading. Is there in fact more here than meets the eye? In stanza two, the speaker moves to yet another curious moment where he/she claims: “Apart we’ll live, tho’ not alone” (line 5), a statement that reaches its conclusion, “If in that One they’ve All?” (line 8). Again, the closing line is a question, which in turn forces the reader to question how to define the nature of their relationship. Stanza three also points to a moment of possible transgression at line ten in which the speaker claims: “Where Hearts confus’dly stray.” The speaker is clearly pointing to the notion of infidelity, yet undeniably the words “confus’dly stray” contribute to the ambiguity of the poem. The word “confus’dly” is offset by the word “mutual,” which when juxtaposed create a curious comparison.

Finch’s indirection and possible masking strategies

in the next three stanzas contribute to further blurred moments and the possibility of a transgressive reading:

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<sup>78</sup> See Harriet Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics 1550-1714* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001): 23.

Where Hands are by stern Parents ty'd,  
Who oft, in Cupids Scorn,  
Do for the widow'd State provide,  
Before that Love is born:

Where some too soon themselves misplace;  
Then in Another find  
The only Temper, Wit or Face,  
That cou'd affect their Mind.

Others (but oh! Avert that Fate!)  
A well-chose Object change:  
Fly, Silvia, fly, ere 'tis too late;  
Fall'n Nature's prone to range.

And, tho's in heat of Love we swear  
More than perform we can;  
No Goddess, You, but Woman are,  
And I no more than Man.

(lines 13-28)

These ideas of a misplaced love, the notion of “otherness,” changed objects, fleeing fallen nature and performance are all evidence of bodily activity that is significant both to Finch's reinterpretation of the pastoral couple and to the notion of same-sex desire.

Moreover, Finch uses the pastoral to create expectations on the part of the reader in order to play against them. From the start of the poem we expect a pastoral love pursuit. We are called from the city to the country, and we expect an exchange between nymph and swain that will culminate in a moment of consummation. Yet what we get instead is a dialogue that ends in a satiric comment on love and marriage:

In Love, in Play, in Trade, in War  
They best themselves acquit,  
Who, tho' their Int'rests shipwreckt are,  
Keep unprov'd their Wit.

(lines 53-56)

Silvia uses the final moments of the poem to call upon a betrayed nymph who stands upon the shores as she watches her lover depart and speaks the above four lines. Silvia uses the testimony and authority of this classical allusion to garner support for her position of being cautious in love. Through example she illustrates that vows are often broken and that “following Nymphs [should] beware,” thus turning this pastoral dialogue into a forewarning to women in love. Both the pastoral form and the practice of indirection allow Finch to make this variation on the pastoral love pursuit with ease.

## Finch's Nymph: The Feeling Subject

Finch makes a woman's consciousness the center of awareness in many of her pastorals. This feature distinguishes her work from most Augustan love poetry, where women generally appear as an insignificant part of life. The typical deification of women as witnessed in Petrarchan conceits suggests that "All a woman has to do in this world is contained within the duties of a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother." Furthermore, a woman "should have gentle Softness, tender fear, and all those parts of Life, which distinguish her from the other sex, with some subordination to it, but such an inferiority that makes her still more lovely."<sup>79</sup> Finch writes against this image. In her pastorals, women appear not as idealized objects, but rather as human subjects expressing their own feelings. They are forthright, intelligent, and often aggressive.

In "Ardelia to Melancholy," a female speaker confesses her overwhelming feelings of pain as she struggles to "drive thee [melancholy] from my darken'd breast" (line 9). The speaker calls upon friendship to her aid, believing that the company of another will be "the end of all my conflicts, see" (line 21). The focus of the poem is on the female speaking self who seeks a friend rather than a lover for support. According to McGovern, Finch's melancholic poems share much in common with the melancholic poetry written in England during her lifetime and after her death. However, a personal and realistic tone distinguishes her poem from other affective literature, such as Robert Blair's "The Grave" (1743) or Edward Young's "Night Thoughts" (1741-45).<sup>80</sup> Finch's "Ardelia to

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<sup>79</sup> See Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, no. 144, Aug. 15, 7).

<sup>80</sup> The difference in tone, for example, between Finch and Young is profound. While both poets struggle with thoughts of life, death, and immortality, notice the difference in the personal voice of Finch compared to the grandeur of Young:

Distinguished link in being's endless chain!  
Midway from nothing to the deity!

Melancholy,” rather, lacks poetic enthusiasm. While it reflects a particular anxiety and expresses grief and a sense of loss, it does not wallow in the self-pity or poetic rapture evident in the poetic sensibility of a Blair and Young. Finch’s speaker, the nymph Ardelia, is able to create with the reader an intimacy that heightens the pathos and seriousness of this melancholic poem and others of its kind, such as “The Spleen,” perhaps through her first-hand experience with melancholy, but undoubtedly through her unique sensitivity to her female speaking subject and her human approach.

In another pastoral poem, “La Passion Vaincue,” Finch takes up the issue of heartbreak and uses the pastoral to suggest a remedy.<sup>81</sup> Her approach mimics that in Behn’s poem, “The Return,” in which a nymph, wronged by her lover, contemplates the consequences of her situation. Yet unlike Behn’s nymph, who turns to revenge, Finch’s nymph considers revenge through suicide:

On the Banks of the Severn a desperate Maid  
 (Whom some Shepherd, neglecting his Vows, had betray’d,)  
 Stood resolving to banish all Sense of the Pain,

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A beam ethereal, sullied, and absorpt!  
 Though sullied and dishonoured, still divine!  
 Dim miniature of greatness absolute!  
 An heir of glory! A frail child of dust!  
 Helpless immortal! Insect infinite!  
 A worm! A god!—I tremble at myself,  
 And in myself am lost! (*Night I*, lines 74-82)

<sup>81</sup> Finch addresses the issue of heartbreak in yet another poem “The Losse,” in which the powerful voice of the female speaker expresses bereavement:

She sigh’d, but soon, itt mix’d with common air,  
 Too fleet a witnesses, for her deep despair;  
 She wept, but tears, no lasting grief can show,  
 For tears will fail, and ebb, as well as flow.  
 She wou’d her tongue, to the sad subject force,  
 But all great passions, are above discourse.  
 Thy heart alone, Ardelia, with itt trust,  
 There grave itt deep, alas! ‘twill fall to dust,  
 \*Urania is no more, to me no more,  
 All these combin’d, can n’er that losse deplore.

\*Urania is the muse of heavenly love.



And pursue, thro' her Death, a Revenge on the Swain.

(lines 1-4)

As the poem continues, Finch explores the structures of supremacy and submission by exposing the paradigms of hierarchy and dominance that characterize erotic relations between men and women: "Since the Gods, and my Passion, at once he defies; / Since his Vanity lives, whilst my Character dies" (lines 5-6). Grounding her critique of repression in traditional representations of the sexes discloses the contradictions within such gender constructions. Thus Finch uses the conventions of the pastoral to critique and dismantle these very structures, in particular when her heroine comes to the conclusion that death is not the solution to heartbreak:

Just ready to plunge, and alone to expire,  
Some Reflection on Death, and its Terrors untry'd,  
Some Scorn for the Shepherd, some Flashings of Pride  
At length pull'd her back, and she cry'd, Why this Strife,  
Since the *Swains* are so Many, and I've but *One* Life.  
(lines 10-14)

In Finch's pastorals, women are also seen outside of sexual relationships, giving affection and guidance to one another. For example, in "The Prodigy," a female speaking subject authoritatively bestows advice to young ladies on how to "maintain their natural prerogative":

And learn the nymphs, how to regain their sway,  
And make this stubborn sex once more obey;  
Call back the fugitives by modest pride,  
And let them fear sometimes to be deny'd;  
Stay 'till their courtship may deserve that name,  
And take not ev'ry look for love and flame;  
To mercenary ends no charms imploy,  
Nor stake their smiles against some ruffled toy:  
For every fop lay not th'insnaring train,  
Nor lose the worthy to allure the vain.

Keep at due distance all attempts of bliss,  
 Nor let too near a whisper seem a kiss.  
 Be not the constant partner of a swain,  
 Except his long address that favor gain;  
 Nor be transported when some trifle's view,  
 Directs his giddy choice to fix on you.  
 Amend whatever may your charms disgrace,  
 And trust not wholly to a conquering face,  
 Nor be your motions rude, coquet or wild,  
 Shuffling or lame, as if in nursing spoil'd:  
 Slight not th'advantage of a graceful mein,  
 Tho' Paris gave the prize to beauty's Queen,  
 When Juno mov'd, Venus could scarce be seen:  
 And if to fashions past you can't submit,  
 Pretend at least to some degree of wit;  
 The men who fear now with it to accost  
 Still love the name, tho' you've the habit   lost.  
 Assert your pow'r in early days begun,  
 Born to undo, be not yourselves undone,  
 Contemn'd, and cheap, as easy to be won...

(lines 24-53)

Contrary to the loose morality of much Restoration poetry, Finch's poetic approach attacks contemporary attitudes toward love and fidelity. Absent of cynicism, she calls into question the typical practices of the nymph and swain and declares that morality and values must be restored. Her persona here speaks from a position of both poetic and moral authority, and she uses the pastoral for didactic purposes to admonish women for participating in trivial love pursuits. As a friend to women, she instructs them to "assert your pow'r in early days begun,/Born to undo, be not yourselves undone"(lines 51-52). Moving the poem from the pastoral to the political, she concludes by aligning women with sovereigns to prove that a steadfast woman, like a solid government, will always find rewards, "If thus, like Sov'reigns you maintain your ground,/The rebels at your feet will soon be found" (lines 54-55).

## Pastoral Marriage: From Swain to Husband

The Restoration male poets are almost unanimous in their deprecation of marriage, in which women are dehumanized and depersonalized in their poems. For example, In *Miscellany Poems upon Several Occasions: Consisting of Original poems, By the late Duke of Buckingham, Mr. Cowly, Mr. Milton, Mr. Prior, Mrs. Behn, Mr. Tho. Brown*, printed in 1692, a poem titled “Upon Marriage: An Epigram By Dr. N.” captures the contemporary male attitude toward marriage:

Unhappy State! To thee, poor Man does owe  
The loss of Innocence and Being too.  
Marriage alone brought in the Tempter Eve,  
It was the Serpent Woman did decieve:  
The Mischeif still continues she began,  
For every Woman is an Evil to Man (lines 1-6)

Another poem in that same collection, “Advice about Marriage: An Imitation of a French Satyr; by Mr. Tho. Brown,” reads:

The Husband’s the Pilot, the Wife is the Ocean,  
He always in Danger, she always in Motion,  
And he that in Wedlock twice hazards his Carcass  
Twice ventures a drowning; and Faith that’s a hard Case,  
Even at our own Weapons the Females defeat us,  
And Death, only Death, can sign our Quietus.  
Not to tell you sad Stories of Liberty lost,  
How our Mirth is all pall’d, and our Pleasures all crost:  
This Pagan Confinement, this damnable Station  
Suits no order, nor age, nor degree in the Nation...

(lines 1-10)

Yet it seems that some women poets, including Finch, were thinking differently about marriage. In “To the Prince of Orange on his Marriage. Written at the time of the Oxford Verses” by Mistress Mary Jones, which appears in *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1757), Jones presents a different view:

Hail wedded love! Perpetual force of peace;  
The calm, where restless passion sinks to ease.  
When hearts united thus each other claim,  
How sweet the friendship! And how soft the flame!  
(lines 16-19)

Yet what makes Finch's contribution to this thinking on marriage unique is that she uses the pastoral to employ her husband as a replacement to the swain figure. In "A Letter to Dafnis" and "An Invitation to Dafnis," Finch celebrates marriage and conjugal love by reversing the traditional role of the nymph and swain.<sup>82</sup> She plays with *carpe diem* themes and uses the convention of the masculine seduction poem as a vehicle for female expression in order to defend the institution of marriage and the role of the wife.

In "A Letter to Dafnis" Finch presents a position in contrast with current popular views of marriage. Within this seventeen-line verse epistle, written to Heneage, her husband of almost a year, Finch explains what marriage should be like and what the proper behaviors of a wife ought to be:

This to the Crown, and blessing of my life,  
The much lov'd husband of a happy wife.  
To him, whose constant passion found the art  
To win a stubborn, and ungratefull heart;  
And to the World, by tend'rest proof discovers  
They err, who say that husbands can't be lovers.  
With such return of passion, as is due,  
Daphnis I love, Daphnis my thoughts persue,  
Daphnis, my hopes, my joys, are bounded all in you:  
Ev'n I, for Daphnis, and my promise sake,  
What I in women censure, undertake.  
But this from love, not vanity, proceeds;  
You know who writes; and I who 'tis that reads.  
Judge not my passion, by my want of skill,  
Many love well, though they express itt ill;  
And I your censure cou'd with pleasure bear,  
Wou'd you but soon return, and speak itt here.

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<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that in the Katharine Rogers edition *Selected Poems of Anne Finch: Countess of Winchelsea* 1979, the name "Dafnis" also appears as "Daphnis" in lines eight and ten of "A Letter to Dafnis."

The poem begins as an intimate and personal address to her husband, who in this poem is referred to by the pastoral sobriquet, “Daphnis.” Described as both her “Crown” and “blessing,” her husband takes on political and spiritual importance in Finch’s life. The word “Crown” indicates both his power and importance in her life as something that is highly valued. One can easily analogize the word with her service to the crown as maid to Mary of Modena. “Crown” could also be interpreted as Christ’s crown, especially when coupled with the word “blessing.” In this sense, Finch illuminates the intensity of her devotion to her husband, whom she is in the service of like her Lord and king.

At line five, Finch turns the focus from the personal to the public with an address to “the World.” At this point she adopts the position of a public spokesperson, proclaiming that contrary to popular belief, husbands can in fact be lovers:

And to the World, by tend’rest proof discovers  
They err, who say that husbands can’t be lovers.  
With such return of passion, as is due,  
Daphnis I love, Daphnis my thoughts pursue,  
Daphnis, my hopes, my joys, are bounded all in you  
Ev’n I, for Daphnis, and my promise sake,  
What I in women censure, undertake.

(lines 5-11)

This thinking disrupts contemporary notions of marriage and current thinking about the potential of the pastoral.<sup>83</sup> As a public spokesperson, she details what a marriage should entail at lines seven and following before proceeding to a discussion of what the role of a

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<sup>83</sup> According to Renato Poggioli in *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975), “In the pastoral, married love and wedded bliss are almost contradictions in terms. No pastoral poet, at least when keeping his inspiration within the bounds of the genre, has felt any inclination to raise his humble eclogue to the level of a solemn epithalamium, or to drown the quiet music of his idyll under the noise of wedding bells. The pastoral does not like happy endings as such precisely because it does not like happiness to end. Exactly because its blissfulness may be only a dream, it prefers to project it on the screen of the present, to arrest for a while the most fleeting instants of human life, which are those we call ‘good times.’ Even when conjugal love is considered, it is generally contemplated statically, in an eternal present, or represented in a typical moment, often taking place a long time after the marriage itself” (55-56).

wife should be. Notice the interplay between the words “Daphnis” and “I” in lines eight through eleven. The repetition of the two words creates a back and forth motion for the reader that highlights the interconnectedness of their love. Finch focuses on the mutual reciprocity and exchange that is implicit in a solid marriage, and she uses the form of the pastoral to convey content—in this case, the significance of balance and harmony in marriage. Furthermore, in defining the nature of their conjugal relationship, Finch in fact builds a satiric picture of the world by which she measures her relationship.

Finally, Finch’s emphasis on censorship and authorship interestingly closes the poem:

But this from love, not vanity, proceeds;  
You know who writes; and I who ‘tis that reads.  
Judge not my passion, by my want of skill,  
Many love well, though they express itt ill;  
And I your censure cou’d with pleasure bear,  
Wou’d you but soon return, and speak itt here.

(lines 12-17)

Finch’s love for her husband is only as passionate and genuine as she can write it. Yet she is cautious to point out that her actual love should not be judged by how well she expresses it. In a moment of what seems like panic, Finch pauses to confer with Daphnis, “You know who writes; and I who ‘tis that reads,” in an attempt to clarify both her intentions in writing and the nature of their relationship. With this line she re-establishes each of their respective roles. Finch desires to make clear that she writes out of love. Yet in defining her relationship with Heneage, Finch in fact defines herself as a woman writer who is fearful of judgment and cautious of censure. There is a particular insecurity that can be read in these final lines. While Finch confesses that she does not fear the censure of her husband—in fact she claims she can “bear” it with “pleasure”—these sentiments imply that

she fears the censure and judgment of others. Imploring that *her* skill not be judged, she moves the poem from the personal to the general, “Many love well, though they express it ill,” in order to suggest that she is no different from the others who attempt to express their passion through words. By aligning herself with the camp of bad poets, she softens the intensity of the poetic censure that she anticipates will shortly follow upon the arrival of her husband. These final lines eloquently illustrate the ambiguous terrain Finch treads as wife, lover, woman, and poet, and the accompanying anxieties of such a multiple consciousness.

In “An Invitation to Dafnis,” Finch adapts the masculine seduction poem to suit her feminine purposes by reversing the typical roles of the nymph and swain.<sup>84</sup> Here, she makes the aggressor figure the nymph, who encourages her husband to leave his studies behind for a trip to the fields with her in Arcadia. Similar to Robert Herrick’s “Corinna’s Going a Maying,” with its *carpe diem* theme and plea to a loved one, Finch’s “Invitation” continually contrasts the civilized world with the pastoral world in an effort to entice her husband to drop his scholarly employments for a more simple existence:

Reading the softest Poetry, refuse,  
To view the subjects of each rural muse;  
Nor lett the busy compasses go round,  
When faery Cercles better mark the ground.  
Rich Colours on the Vellum cease to lay,  
When ev’ry lawne much nobler can display,  
When on the daz’ling poppy may be seen  
A glowing red, exceeding your carmine;  
And for the blew that o’re the Sea is borne,  
A brighter rises in our standing corn.  
Come then, my Dafnis, and the fields survey,  
And throo’ the groves, with your Ardelia stray.

(lines 13-24)

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<sup>84</sup> In *The Garden and the City; Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1969), Maynard Mack claims that “An Invitation to Dafins” is a decidedly masculine seduction convention that is converted by Finch as a vehicle for feminine response in which the reader simultaneously experiences both traditional expectations for this genre, and amused surprise at the poet’s deviation from these expectations (103).

In her point-by-point comparison between art and nature, Ardelia argues that her husband's occupations pale in comparison to their natural counterparts. The civilized world is made to seem artificial when compared to the beauties of the natural world. Reading poetry is but a meager substitute for viewing nature; the compass is no comparison to fairy circles; and the fabricated colors of the civilized world are far inferior to the colors in nature.

Ardelia is persistent and relentless in her pursuit.

Adopting the role of the typical swain, she goes to great lengths to conquer her lover.<sup>85</sup> Her tone is one of authority. As a wife-figure she ardently pursues her husband/territory. She is dangerous, "her dangerous attacks"; commanding, "Think not"; and confident of both her ability to intimidate and her strength as a poet, "Of strong, confederate Syllables."

Finally, Finch adapts the conventions of the seduction poem popular with Cavalier and Restoration poets to create an invitation to her husband, with Dafnis acting as a figure replacing the swain. Unlike the trivial love pursuits of pastoral poetry that hinge upon an illicit love, this love pursuit is authorized through marriage, and thus the love that Finch describes is mutual and reciprocal in nature: "Come then, my Dafnis, and the fields survey,/ And thro' the Groves, with your Ardelia stray" (lines 45-46). In the final stanza of the poem, she promises that in Nature they will find peace and "all to love envite" (line 56) if Dafnis will pursue such rural delights.

Finch's manipulation of the landscape in which she moves beyond the mere celebration of nature to explore its other functions is reminiscent of Behn's "A Song to a

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<sup>85</sup> McGovern claims that the speaker makes his studies into a metaphoric fortress, which she vows to storm with her own troops. These personal martial forces, which she shall gather to challenge Louis and to steal away her Dafnis, are none other than Apollo and the Muses. With their help, her poetry will be victorious,



Scottish Tune,” in which the speaker illuminates how nature can be an active participant in the union of lovers and can exist in many ways solely for their purpose. Two passages, the first from Behn and the second from Finch, illuminate the similarities:

See the Flowers how sweetly they spread,  
And each displayes his coloured head,  
To make for us a fragrant Bed,  
To practise our new blisses...  
(lines 5-8)

Finch crafts a similar type of landscape:

Come, and attend, how as we walk along,  
Each chearfull bird, shall treat us with a song,  
Nott such as Fopps compose, where witt, nor art,  
Nor plainer Nature, ever bear a part;  
The Cristall springs, shall murmur as we passé,                      But not like Courtiers,  
sinking to disgrace;  
Nor, shall the louder Rivers, in their fall,  
Like unpaid Saylers, or hoarse Pleaders brawle;  
But all shall form a concert to delight,  
And all to peace, and all to love envite.  
(lines 47-56).

While in both passages nature serves as more than a mere background for human happenings to become an active influence in the conspiring of the two lovers, capable of evoking a genuine, subjective response, Finch complicates her pastoral landscape even further by adding a social and political component. Nature, and its conspiring forces, the birds, the springs, and the rivers, are all juxtaposed against the Fopps, the Courtiers, the Saylers, and the Pleaders as a means of heightening the comparison between country and city, and as a means of promulgating a new way of looking at the pastoral landscape as a natural and peaceful place, capable of influencing and fostering mutual love.

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enabling her to storm every fort and take every town to win her Dafnis. Her poems, she says, like the songs of Orpheus on his magic lute, will make everyone defenseless against her attack....

The love described in these stanzas, as in others of this poem, is not a hierarchical love based upon difference, but a progressive love that acknowledges the possibility of mutual passion, equal love, and perfect respect. Thus in Finch's model, which deviates from those of her pastoral predecessors, the natural world responds to both male and female desires, and nature provides both the place and the opportunity to improve upon the practices of love. The mutual, marital love Finch describes is compared to the story of Baucis and Philemon from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* VIII, 611-724, in which this aged couple was noted for their enduring love and harmony with nature. Thus Finch's seduction argument is actually a celebration of her own marriage and the possibility of conjugal love.

## **Divinely Inspired Erotic Longings: The Pastorals of Elizabeth Singer Rowe**

- I. Introduction: Revisiting Elizabeth Singer Rowe
- II. Critical Responses to Singer Rowe
- III. Linking Watts with Singer Rowe
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## Introduction

The reader will find here a spirit dwelling in flesh,  
elevated into divine transports congenial to those of  
angels and unbodied minds. Her intense love to her God kindles at every hint, and  
transcends the limits of mortality. I scarce ever met with any devotional writings  
which gave us an example of a soul, at special seasons, so far raised above every  
thing that is not immortal and divine. (Watts, 9)

These lines found in the preface to the 1738 edition of *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation and Soliloquy Prayer and Praise by the late pious and ingenious Mrs. Elizabeth Singer Rowe, reviewed and published at her request by Isaac Watts, D.D.*, are an apposite summation of the sentiments that are peppered throughout the literature on Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737). In fact, scholarship on Singer Rowe seems to indicate that an intensive inquiry into her biography is a necessary component to understanding her work. Critics spend countless pages attempting to pinpoint Singer Rowe's religious, social, and political affiliations as a means of explaining away the difficult and curious moments, the inconsistencies, and the breaches of style, form, and content implicit in Singer Rowe—in essence the artist and her work.<sup>86</sup> Was she a Pietist, a Pantheist, a Deist, an Orthodox Puritan, a Romantic, a Sentimentalist, an Evangelist, a Mystic, a Proto-feminist, a Pseudo-Learned Lady, a Heterodox Christian, a Platonist, an Independent, a Whig? The scholarship on Singer Rowe is riddled with these frustrating attempts to assign categorical classification to her work, yet Singer Rowe consistently resists categorization. Rather, she carves out for herself her own positions using “her design” (Stecher, 211), by skillfully employing a range of conventions that resist historical and literary categories. She is neither a seventeenth century “throwback” nor a pre-Romantic. She does not neatly fit into

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<sup>86</sup> Here I am referring to the recent work of Harry Stecher, Madeline Forrell Marshall, John J. Richetti, Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Mary Kathleen Morgan and to Singer Rowe's contemporaries Theophilus Singer Rowe, Henry Grove, and Theophilus Cibber.

the camp of “pietism” and “sentimentalism.” She does not fit the categories of Augustan or Christian sublime as John Hoyles and David Morris respectively suggest, for as a writer of religious and secular verse her work challenges these categories. She is a writer of complimentary and occasional verse, meditations, biblical paraphrases, epic verse, letters, pastorals, and divine love poetry. Her work is similar to, yet distinct from, the works of Isaac Watts, Alexander Pope, George Herbert, Abraham Cowley, Richard Steele, and John Milton. Her literary contributions are personal, intimate, erotic, suggestive, challenging, spiritual, feminine, and provocative.

Even though it is nearly impossible to position Singer Rowe within a literary camp, in this chapter I argue that undeniably Singer Rowe is a pastoral poet.<sup>87</sup> While to date no scholarship treats Singer Rowe specifically as a pastoral poet, the sheer volume of pastoral poems within her poetic oeuvre and the occurrence of the pastoral throughout her literary career suggest that Singer Rowe’s attraction to the form was clearly a preoccupation. In her correspondence she uses the device of role-playing to impersonate the shepherdess of pastoral poetry, the abandoned mistress, and the heart-broken nymph. Pastoral nuances are further reflected in her amatory verses, her religious verses, and her translations. She plays with the pastoral and even mocks its conventions. In a letter dated 1729, Singer Rowe writes to Lady Hertford from her retirement in Frome:

I find by a too guilty experience, that people in low life take an insolent sort of pleasure in leveling their superiors; but I must own, that since I have divested you of your titles and equipage, you are grown more intimate and familiar to my imagination, and my affection for you is heightened by conversing upon an equality with you. I have visited your cleanly farm without any ceremony, and wandered in green pastures flocked with lowing herds and bleating flocks. Only your domestics are not quite so elegant as I could wish. Instead of such nice romantic damsels as

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<sup>87</sup> Singer Rowe too was a pastoralist throughout the entirety of her career. Pastoral nuances are reflected in her amatory verses, her religious verses, and her translations.

Almeda, I meet harmless, unthinking, round-faced lasses; and for powdered beaux in shining liveries, mimicking opera airs and songs, I meet Colin and Lubberkin, with russet coats and sun-burnt faces, whistling some awkward tune, or roaring out a country ballad with voices as harsh as their fellow animals which bellow on the mountains...<sup>88</sup>

Singer Rowe critiques the romanticized portraits of rustics, highlighting the superficial quality of these idealized figures. While these rustics and farmers serve to make a comparison between the superficiality of the court and the simplicities of country life, Singer Rowe claims that Hertford's "domestics" do not conform to the ideal, thus breaking the pastoral illusion. Singer Rowe challenges the concept of an idealized country life that consists of humble cottagers tending their fleecy flocks or taking part in making garlands and pastoral poems for country holidays, yet her correspondence indicates that she was aware of the realities of rural life and natural beauty.

A distinction can be made between her early and later work: her *Poems on Several Occasions, by Philomela* (1696) and her poetic contributions to *The Athenian Mercury* illustrate a marked difference in style, content, and form from her later work, *Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728), *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1729), *The History of Joseph* (1736) and *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737). This move away from pastoral poetry toward pietistic expression, however, does not suggest that her earlier work lacks maturity or seriousness of purpose, as Henry Stecher suggests.<sup>89</sup> Nor does this shift suggest that she considered the pastoral to be an elementary poetic form

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<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Singer Rowe. *Letters on various occasions, in prose and verse. By the author of Friendship in death. To which are added ten letters by another hand* (London: Printed for T. Worrall, 1729).

<sup>89</sup> Henry Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome: A Study in Eighteenth-Century English Pietism* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1973): 71.

she would later discard for higher models, as much of Singer Rowe's later work remains figured in pastoral terms and is heavily imbued with pastoral landscape descriptions and imagery, particularly in her discussions of heaven and the afterlife in both *Letters Moral and Entertaining* and *Devout Exercises of the Heart*.<sup>90</sup>

Thus I argue in this chapter that Singer Rowe was a pastoral poet who made significant contributions to the form by using the pastoral to rewrite constructions of gender and sexuality. I begin the chapter with an investigation of the critical responses to Singer Rowe, in particular how contemporary scholars have aligned her work with that of Isaac Watts, in order to offer a rationale as to how Singer Rowe has previously been perceived, approached, and studied, and how these approaches fail to acknowledge her marked differences. From there I investigate Singer Rowe's pastoral landscapes and how they were potentially shaped and/or influenced by classical predecessors. I then argue that Singer Rowe reworks conventions and traditions, in particular the elegy and confessional lyricism, to give voice to her pastoral priorities: her desire to use the pastoral to investigate gender difference and to express spiritual longings and female desire. Through a close reading of several of her pastoral poems, I argue that Singer Rowe pushes the limitations of the form by infusing elegiac and confessional qualities, thus making it a form conducive to personal discovery, inquiry, and lament. By disrupting the boundaries between sacred and secular verse, Singer Rowe moves beyond the traditional pastoral to carve out a space for

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<sup>90</sup> In Letter II of *Friendship in Death*, a gentleman writes to his friend in England describing heaven as a pastoral paradise:

"But how shall I describe this fair, this fragrant, this enchanting Land of Love! The delectable vales and flow'ry lawns, the myrtle shades and rosy bowers, the bright cascades and chrysal rivulets rolling over orient pearls and sands of gold: here they spread their silent waves into broad transparent lakes, smooth as the face of Heaven; and there they break with rapid force through arching rocks of diamond and purple amethyst. Plants of immortal verdure creep up the sparkling cliffs, and adorn the prospect with unspeakable variety. Oh my Beville, could I lead you through the luxurious bowers and soft recesses where pleasure keeps its eternal festivals, and revels with guiltless and unmolested freedom!"(7-8).

female desire, religious reflection, and contemplation. I conclude by arguing that Singer Rowe's pastorals offer a powerful revision of the pastoral tradition, both in terms of constructing a space for the articulation of female desire, spirituality, and retirement, and for their challenges to heteronormativity in the pastoral tradition and in culture at large.



## Critical Responses to Singer Rowe

Singer Rowe's literary productions are blanketed by the praise her contemporaries bestowed upon her, making it difficult to penetrate the biographical barriers that surround her work. In virtually every example of scholarship on Singer Rowe dating back to her contemporaries, details from her life are employed to explain her work. In the preface to Singer Rowe's *Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Singer Rowe*, both Theophilus Rowe, her brother-in-law, and Henry Grove focus on the character and manners of Singer Rowe by highlighting everything from her appearance to her religious convictions. While this is expected in a biographical sketch, when discussions of her work do surface, they are inextricably tied to her life:

Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe, not more admired for her fine writings by the ingenious that did not know her, than esteemed and lov'd by all her acquaintances, for the many amiable qualities of her heart, was born at Ilchester in Somersetshire, Sept. 11 1674...(iv).

Similar biographical material is mentioned in a three-part series on Singer Rowe in Volume IX of the May and June 1793 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine*:

But this excellent Lady (as was observed of an eminent Genius of the last Age) possessed so much Strength and Firmness of Mind, and such a perfect natural Goodness, as could not be perverted by the Largeness of her Wit, and was Proof against the Art of Poetry itself. The elegant Letters which gave Occasion to remark this Distinction in Mrs. Singer Rowe's character, as a polite Writer, are not only chaste and innocent, but greatly subservient to the Interest of Heaven, and evidently designed, by representing Virtue in all her genuine Beauty, to recommend her to the Choice and Admiration of Mankind (285)

Again, Singer Rowe's mind and manners are one.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, the language of the editorial comments suggests that while intelligent, Singer Rowe was first and foremost good—so good as not to let her mind be perverted by “the largeness of her wit.” And in volume four of Theophilus Cibber's *Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (1753), her talents and character are elevated to the level of the angelic. She is described as having “an uncommon display of genius” (326). The “grandeur of her sentiments, and the sublimity of her devotion” are unparalleled (327). She is aligned with all that is pure, she is coupled with saints, and her interests are heavenly.

Recent studies on Singer Rowe do little to further the scholarship, as critics continue in the tradition of prioritizing Singer Rowe the subject, not the artist. John Richetti's reductive comments in “Mrs. Elizabeth Singer Rowe: The Novel as Polemic” in *Popular Fictions Before 1700* and Hoxie Neale Fairchild's section on Singer Rowe under the title heading of “Divine Poets” in *Religious Trends in English Poetry* focus a critical gaze not on Singer Rowe's work but on her life.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Fairchild's positioning of Singer Rowe within the section on “Divine Poets” is understandable in light of the tradition he details, yet Singer Rowe could easily occupy a position within another of the book's sections, “The Beginnings of Sentimentalism,” “Sentimentalism—Mild Cases,” “Sentimentalism—Severer Cases,” or even “Protestantism and Sentimentalism,” a point Fairchild fails to mention. By labeling Singer Rowe a “divine poet,” Fairchild ignores Singer Rowe's full range of poetic potential. Fairchild and Richetti spend a considerable

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<sup>91</sup> Joanna Lipking, in her study of the conventions of seventeenth-century commendatory poems on women writers, suggests that men praise these women for their writerly abilities as poets (like men), but their praises repeatedly harken back to their gender as women. A “characteristic feature of men's commendations” is “their ineluctable drift toward the feminine side of her identity” (59).

<sup>92</sup> This approach is mimicked by other critics such as Marlene Hansen, who titles her study, “The Pious Mrs. Singer Rowe.”

amount of time detailing Singer Rowe's lifestyle; both mention her meditative retirement, her father the pious dissenter; her ability to "lisp in numbers at the age of twelve" (Fairchild, 1: 134); her breeding, her spirit, her religion, her friendships and her education. The end result is a reduction of Singer Rowe to two images, the one as pious poet-exemplar and the other as morbid recluse, longing for an eroticized afterlife in heaven.

These attempts to understand and explain Singer Rowe using biographical details continue the precedent that was set by her contemporaries. Yet such approaches, which are seen in virtually every study that has been done on Singer Rowe to date, are reductive and misleading.<sup>93</sup> As readers, we immediately position Singer Rowe within a religious context. Moreover, by attempting to explain her work through her biography we overlook the inconsistencies, the multiplicity of voices, the generic variations, and the tonal and modal changes implicit in her writings. We overlook the artist, writer, and thinker when we prioritize her personal commitments, which incidentally seem to have been ever-changing and varied. As her personal reputation succeeds her literary accomplishments, it is both difficult and intimidating to penetrate the protective barrier of religiosity that surrounds Singer Rowe and her work. As a result, we approach Singer Rowe with caution. We tiptoe around her reputation in fear of dismantling her elevated status. We resist and skirt analytical probity in the name of preservation. Furthermore, reading Singer Rowe's work through the lens of her pious reputation limits the scope of interpretive possibilities,

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<sup>93</sup> In an exhaustive study on Singer Rowe Harry Stecher (previously referenced), spends little time discussing her actual works and chooses rather to devote the majority of the text to positioning Singer Rowe both within a religious camp and a literary tradition. For Stecher, Singer Rowe occupies a multiplicity of different positions, from upholding a sentimental view on life "...this sentimental life was perhaps the only life she was capable of appreciating" (185), to experiencing "mystical-like transports" deemed as "purely irrational" (189), to being related to the "classical tradition by the didactic nature of her compositions" (195). This hodgepodge of characterizations and categorical pinings is mind boggling, and it only contributes to furthering the confusion on Singer Rowe. Yet by the end, Stecher does come to some resolve, almost humorously, when he states, "she was obviously somewhat eclectic" (211).

especially when studying her pastorals, which often contain subversive subtexts that suggest far-reaching possibilities and roles for women other than pious exemplar, in a time when acceptable modes of behavior for women were being narrowly defined.

## **Linking Watts with Singer Rowe**

Another popular approach in Singer Rowe scholarship is to couple her with Isaac Watts (1674-1748). In fact, many critics first discuss Watts, his reputation and body of works, before introducing Singer Rowe, as if to prescribe or even dictate the ways in which we should read Singer Rowe and understand her work. This is an interesting strategy and one that is employed by many twentieth-century critics such as Doody, Richetti, Fairchild, Stecher, Madigan, Marshall, and Reeves. For example, Richetti states: “She moved in her youth in pious but elegant dissenting circles, where her friends included the celebrated Bishop Ken and Isaac Watts” (522). Fairchild begins his discussion of Singer Rowe with this opening line: “Like her close friend, Watts, Elizabeth Singer, who became the famous Mrs. Singer Rowe, is firmly linked with seventeenth-century Puritanism” (134). Mary Madigan also authorizes the work of Singer Rowe through the mention of Watts when she states, “Though little has been written about her works, Elizabeth Singer Rowe was a well-known author in her time, earning the respect of such writers as Isaac Watts...” (107). Stecher refers to her as an “admirer of Watts” and argues that “the literary productions between Watts and Singer Rowe show great similarities” (100). Marshall couples Watts and Singer Rowe in her study on “Teaching the Uncanonized: The Examples of Watts and Rowe” and claims that Singer Rowe “resembles Watts in her deployment of strong imagery, particularly that of physical love, to figure divine experience” (15). Finally, Marjorie Reeves claims, somewhat surprisingly, that the true “poet” of Singer Rowe was actually Isaac Watts (7).

There are similarities between Watts and Singer Rowe. Both are immersed in the passion of God and are convinced of his greatness. Each mentions the unspeakable

vastness of the cosmos and God's intercourse with the human heart. They both uphold the belief that God is to be loved with the mind and that reason must not be discounted in the exercising of faith or the discipline of the Christian life. The mystery of God and God himself, while never irrational, is a constant fascination for these writers, who recognize that he is larger than any reason can fathom.

Yet linking Singer Rowe with Watts clearly does a disservice to Singer Rowe. It allows the critic of Singer Rowe to authorize her work by positioning her alongside an already established tradition of Pietistic writing and an accepted body of work. Ultimately, aligning Singer Rowe with Watts tends to gloss over their marked differences. Her uniqueness of style and approach are easily overlooked and overshadowed by the reputation of Watts as the founder of modern English hymnody. By linking her with Watts we align her with a tradition that she resembles, but one of which she is not an exclusive member. Whether conscious or not, we assign certain expectations to her work once we align her with the Pietistic tradition of Watts. We assume a level of decorum and conventionality. We think of stodgy hymns characterized by an occasional flight of fancy, whose only drama lies in the melodic quality of its verse. Yet Singer Rowe frequently moves in and out of this tradition to explore other writerly venues. Furthermore, rooting Singer Rowe in a tradition that has its origins with Watts is incorrect as it negates her female-centered approach to the world and to writing. If we had to align her with a certain tradition, we would be better served by placing her alongside the female mystics, dating back to Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), and Margery Kempe (1373-1438),<sup>94</sup> or other

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<sup>94</sup> See also Helen Wilcox, "'My hart is full, my Soul dos ouer flow': Women's Devotional Poetry in Seventeenth-Century England," *Forging Connections: Women's Poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Anne Mellor, Felicity Nussbaum, and Jonathan F.S. Post (San Marino: Huntington Library, 2002): 19-38, for a thorough discussion of female devotional writers of the seventeenth century.

female writers such as Christine de Pizan (1365-1430). Here we would be more apt to recognize the unconventionalities in her work, her refreshing and bizarre source material, her blurring of genres, styles and approaches, her obsessions and passions, and her unique relationship with God, friends, and lovers.

## **Exploring Tensions: Singer Rowe's Appropriation of the Pastoral**

The overlapping tensions Singer Rowe experiences between her personal and professional lives encourage the creation of a female-specific space from which to read her art and world. Thus the pastoral proves to be the ideal forum in which Singer Rowe accommodates uninhibited desire while maintaining her respectability as a pious woman. Specifically, her poetic use and manipulation of classical pastoral conventions allow Singer Rowe the ability to reformulate social class, activate the role of woman, alter male and female gender dynamics, and tackle complex social issues of female desire and spirituality. Singer Rowe works simultaneously within and against the patriarchal conditions of the Restoration by addressing such concerns within the pastoral tradition that acts as a gloss from which to express herself while upholding the standards of virtue and decorum. The pastoral provides a space for the articulation of struggle, particularly regarding her inability to reconcile the tensions she felt as a woman and a writer, torn between societal restrictions and personal desires. While I do not want to suggest a conflict between “private” and “public” worlds per se, as I believe that it would be virtually impossible to delineate a private female space for the seventeenth century, the dialectical role I see Singer Rowe playing within her poetry is that of a pious woman whose artistic and intelligent scholarship is confined to acceptable modes of decorum, and that of a progressive female writer who is skeptical about relationships, identity, spirituality, and integrity within her personal world. Such tensions are explicit in her pastoral poetry.



## Influences/Predecessors of Singer Rowe

It is difficult to align Singer Rowe's pastorals with a particular tradition. She chooses from an enormously diversified range of literary models and stylistic registers afforded by her predecessors and contemporaries. It is virtually impossible to characterize her pastoral landscape and make sense of her often coded messages that carry with them a considerable load of cultural and ideological weight. In one respect, her writings about country life hark back to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, as they speak of husbandry, agriculture, and farming. We frequently see shepherds herding goats, sheep, and cattle, and laborers harvesting and sowing, as in her poem "A Pastoral. Inscrib'd to Mrs. Frances Worsley":

...Beneath a shade that skreen'd the burning ray  
They sit; their bleating flocks around them stray:  
While thus th'unhappy youth, in mournful strains,  
Of his ungrateful shepherdess complains...

(lines 18-21)

Yet there is no degree of elaboration or artifice in her poetry through the use of literary dialects such as in Theocritus's *Idylls*, nor a Georgic influence with its prolonged and detailed descriptions of rustic life and labor. Singer Rowe was apparently aware of these influences, but ultimately her work moves away from a rustic influence toward a more exploratory space where spiritual tranquility, personal inquiry, meditation, and love both divine and spiritual are to be found, as in her poem "To Chloe. An Epistle":

All hail, ye fields and ev'ry happy grove!  
How your soft scenes the tender flame improve,  
And melt the thoughts, and turn the soul to love!

(lines 21-23)

The timeless idea of the tranquility of life in the country expressed by Fontenelle and others is also present in this poem:

Fair Chloe, leave the noisy town, and try  
 What artless sweets the country scenes supply:  
 While the young year in all its pride invites,  
 And promises a thousand gay delights;  
 While the glad sun his fairest light displays,  
 And op'ning blossoms court his cheerful rays.  
 The nymphs for thee shall deck some rural bow'r  
 With every verdant branch and painted flow'r;  
 To thee the swains full canisters shall bring,  
 Of all the fragrant treasures of the spring:  
 While some young shepherd in the sounding grove  
 Shall tune his reed for thee to strains of love.  
 Nor from the soft, enchanting accents run,  
 For who the pleasing charms of love would shun;  
 Such love as in these guiltless seats is known,  
 Such as a state of innocence might own...

(lines 1-16)

Furthermore, her pastoral world frequently resembles the eighteenth-century concept of the holy hermitage, where both man and woman can turn to the country for contemplation, as illustrated in *Letters Moral and Entertaining*. At times, Singer Rowe's pastoral space resembles a blend of Rapin and the neo-classicists with their emphasis on the Golden Age as in her poem "A Pastoral. In Imitation of Drayton's Second Nymphal."

One can further see an influence of James Thomson (1700-1748), whom Singer Rowe apparently read and enjoyed.<sup>95</sup> Like Thomson's retreat space, Singer Rowe's pastoral space is often characterized by innocence, goodness, and peace as in her poem "To a Friend Who Persuades Me to Leave the Muses":

...All that Poet loves I have in view,  
 Delightful Hills, refreshing Shades, and  
 Pleasant Valleys too,  
 Fair spreading Valleys cloath'd with lasting green,  
 And Sunny Banks with gilded streams between,  
 Gay as Elisium, in a Lovers Dream,  
 Or Flora's Mansion, seated by a stream,

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<sup>95</sup> According to Stecher, "James Thomson's poem 'Winter,' which appeared in 1726, immediately caught Singer Rowe's attention. His appreciation of natural beauty and his visual descriptions of the countryside appealed to her romantic tastes" (152).

Where free from sullen cares I live at ease,  
Indulge my Muse, and wishes, as I please,  
Exempt from all that looks like want or strife,  
I smoothly glide along the Plains of Life...

(lines 21-29)

These lines are an early indication of the pastoral space and style which characterize both Singer Rowe's profane and devout verse. This idyllic pastoral setting is frequently the standard scene for her spiritual and amatory meditations. While she does play with the idea of retreat and escape, and frequently uses nature to serve as a shelter from the upheavals of London life and politics, the country is not merely a place of escape. Singer Rowe employs this setting when contemplating the divine, when speaking of desire, and when exploring injustices such as infidelity and unrequited love. It is the scene of her meditations, her laments, and her explorations religious and other.

## Good Nymph/Bad Nymph: Singer Rowe's Treatment of Gender and Sexuality

In many of her pastorals, Singer Rowe employs female desire not to support a male fantasy of sexual irresistibility, but rather to offer an inversion of that convention to expose the figure of the sexualized female. In such poems the reader frequently encounters nymphs in pursuit of swains who both recognize their desires as valid and are not afraid to act upon their sexual impulses. Through an interesting juxtaposition of two nymph figures, one coy, one promiscuous, Singer Rowe exposes the figure of the sexualized nymph as a possible model of behavior in "A Pastoral. Inscib'd to Mrs. Frances Worsley." Sylvia, the pride of all the rural train," who is described as "coy" and seen fleeing from Celadon, "her intreating lover" (line 12), is introduced alongside Aurora, "a nymph divine" who "pursu'd a youth, who her embraces fled" (lines 61 and 64). Singer Rowe juxtaposes these two figures ultimately to give expression to female desire and the powers of love. The poem opens with a description of Sylvia and quickly turns to her lover Celadon, whose "graceful form by nature seem'd design'd/To charm the nicest of the beauteous kind" (lines 3-4). Yet when Sylvia "her intreating lover fled," Celadon is defeated and "in mournful strains/Of his ungrateful shepherdess complains" (lines 20-21). At this point the perspective of the poem changes, and the next 34 lines are spoken by Celadon himself who turns to nature to tell his woes:

I wake to new despair, and tell my pain  
To whisp'ring winds and sounding rocks in vain:  
Yet these, relentless fair, more kind than thee,  
In sighing echoes seem to plead for me

(lines 38-41).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> These lines are reminiscent of verses found in Singer Rowe's "By Despair," in which the nymph turns to nature to express her pain, ultimately finding nature to be more receptive than her swain:

Celadon closes his lament with a discussion of nature as the perfect retreat from the “busy city’s restless noise” (line 52), where “love triumphs” on the “peaceful plains,” and from there, the poem quickly shifts to a discussion of Aurora.

This introductory material of the poem is in keeping with traditional pastoral. A coy, beautiful nymph rejects a persistent swain who then turns to nature to tell of his woes. Nature invites the thoughts of the swain and proves to be the perfect backdrop for the lovers:

The conscious trees their verdant branches spread,  
Inviting lovers to their friendly shade:  
These scenes were made for love; each whisp’ring stream  
And painted vale require the tender theme.  
(lines 46-49).

This natural background is then compared with the “busy city’s restless noise,” only to reaffirm the importance of a rural retreat.

Yet the poem changes direction entirely and breaks from convention with the introduction of Aurora. Unlike traditional pastorals, where a female figure would certainly be discouraged by an entreating lover, Aurora proves unstoppable. Initially described as “a nymph divine,/ With rosy cheeks, and sparkling eyes,” she is later seen roving the woods as a “savage huntress” who “tracks the foaming boar” (lines 71-73). She is not discouraged by her lover’s retreat but rather buoyed by the challenge of ultimate conquest: “to different cares her thoughts were now confin’d,/ Endymion’s image had possest her mind” (lines 4-75). By characterizing Aurora as a nymph divine/savage huntress, Singer Rowe complicates the traditional pastoral nymph figure. This multi-layered depiction suggests

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To see my tears the gentle floods swell high,  
The Rocks relent, and groan as oft as I,  
The wind less deaf, than my ungreatful Swain,

that women are capable of upholding multiple subject positions, and thus while initially shy and “gentler far,” this nymph ultimately recognizes her own sexual impulses and consciously acts upon her desires:

On Latmos' top the lovely youth she found,  
Gently reclin'd upon the verdant ground,  
His senses all in balmy slumbers drown'd.  
Not young Adonis ever look'd more fair;  
An am'rous breeze plays with his careless hair:  
The virgin goddess fix'd her wond'ring sight;  
Above her own transparent orb roll'd bright,  
And all the stars lent their officious light.  
She views his blooming charms with fond surprise,  
Unusual transports in her bosom rise;  
An unaccustom'd wish her breast inspires;  
And now she checks, now sooths her wild desires,  
Approaches softly now, and now retires:  
At last resol'vd, a modest kiss she steals,  
While Venus laughing, all the theft reveals.

(lines 76-90)

This scene is significant on two counts. First, it marks Aurora's struggle to resist her beloved, Endymion, and to uphold convention by suppressing her sexual desires. Upon sight of the swain, feelings of desire arise in Aurora, yet the speaker goes to great lengths to emphasize that these feelings are “unusual” and “unaccustomed,” and therefore innocent. Each of her advancing actions is mirrored with a moment of hesitation or retreat: “And now she checks, now sooths her wild desires,/Approaches softly now, and now retires.” Second, Singer Rowe too approaches this moment with some resistance repeating the word “now” to plot Aurora's every move and slow down the action of the poem, perhaps indicative of Singer Rowe's own hesitation to articulate female desire. Yet ultimately, with the help of nature Aurora gives in to her desires and is “at last resolv'd.”

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Listen and breath o're all my sighs again...(lines 11-14).

The poem closes with a *carpe diem* moment; the speaker advises gods and men to submit to love. Through a direct address, the speaker assures Sylvia, the “good” nymph, that some day she too will feel love’s power, “And trust me, Sylvia, some propitious hour/shall yet arrive, when thou shalt feel his pow’r” (lines 93-4). While Sylvia is in fact “soften’d by his melting lays” and “returns a smile” to the shepherd, she ultimately retires and “strives her alter’d thoughts to hide.” Yet why? All of the forces around her, in particular nature, the speaker, and her companions, encourage her to yield to her desires. Not even the tale of a naughty nymph can convince Sylvia that submitting to desire is acceptable. Rather, she holds her position of resistance with steadfast determination, hiding her “alter’d thoughts” in order to uphold her “decent pride.” Perhaps Singer Rowe ends the poem in this manner as a gentle reminder of the oppressive force of desire for women. Regardless of the shepherd’s attractiveness, and regardless of who authorizes the love, Sylvia must maintain her female honour and “pride,” a word used to characterize her at both the opening and closing of the poem. Perhaps Sylvia can be read as Singer Rowe, who finds herself treading an ambiguous terrain between assertion and ambition as a writer and submission as a woman. Or, perhaps Singer Rowe doubles back to the idea of virginal innocence in order to couch her more provocative suggestions of female desire seen through the figure of Aurora in the middle of the poem. Either way, it is a curious move by Singer Rowe. As readers, we come away from the poem not knowing whether the expression of female desire is deemed acceptable, but certainly possible, as seen through the nymph, Aurora.

## Singer Rowe's Subversive Treatment of Love and Relationships

While each of Singer Rowe's pastoral poems brings with it a variation in style and content, a thematic twist, or a blurring of generic convention, in "To Madam S---at the Court," Singer Rowe illustrates how a simple call to a rural retreat provides an opportunity to exploit the pastoral's form to give expression to Sapphic desire. Singer Rowe subversively complicates her pastoral space by embedding within it suggestions of Sapphic love eloquently masked by the poem's form:

Come prethee leave the Courts  
And range the Fields with me;  
A thousand pretty Rural sports  
I'le here invent for thee.

Involv'd in blissful innocence  
Wee'l spend the shining day,  
Untoucht with that mean influence  
The duller world obey.

About the flowry Plains wee'l rove,  
As gay and unconfin'd:  
As are inspir'd by thee and love  
The saleys of my mind.

Now seated by a lovely Stream,  
Where beauteous Mermaids haunt;  
My Song while William is my Theam,  
Shall them and thee inchant.

Then in some gentle soft retreat;  
Secure as Venus Groves,  
We'l all the charming things repeat,  
That introduc'd our loves.

I'le pluck fresh Garlands for thy brows,  
Sweet as a Zephirs breath.  
As fair and well design'd as those  
The Elisyum Lovers wreath.

And like those happy Lovers we,



As careless and as blest;  
Shall in each others converse be  
Of the whole world possest.

Then prethee Phillis leave the Courts,  
And range the Fields with me;  
Since I so many harmless sports  
Can here procure for thee.

(lines 1-32)

In many respects, the poem seems like a traditional pastoral poem. Upon first glance it does not seem to threaten or challenge convention. There is an invocation to the country, rural sporting, and a promise of love, free from the influences of “the duller world.” The idea of convening that is common to so many pastorals is the poem’s major theme. Singer Rowe details a life of conscious simplicity and pastoral carelessness free from worldly care.<sup>97</sup> Yet once among the groves, the speaker encourages Madam S. to come and share in her revelry, “untoucht with that mean influence/ The duller world obey.” Singer Rowe does not define the “mean influence,” and yet from the context of the stanza it is clear that the speaker is encouraging a deviation from whatever it is that the “duller world obeys.” Singer Rowe prioritizes the idea of blissful innocence and purity in an attempt to suggest that the love she speaks of, while not sanctioned by the rest of the world, is not only authorized within this space but deemed innocent. This pastoral space is a place where they can be “like those happy Lovers,” “careless” in each other’s company. Singer Rowe compares the love the speaker desires and that of other lovers through her use of the pronoun “those,” which exists in opposition to an implied “our.” Moreover, her language choices of “unconfined” and “careless” to describe their love suggest that outside of this pastoral space their love is perhaps characterized by careful restraint.

Albeit a free space, there is a sense of security for the lovers upon entering the grove. Notice how Singer Rowe moves the reader from the open range of the fields in stanza one and the plains in stanza three to the even more remote space of the “gentle soft retreat” of the grove. In moving from court, to country, to private retreat, Singer Rowe delimits her pastoral space, providing further security for the lovers. Moreover, opening stanzas three, four, and five with natural imagery allows Singer Rowe to couch her more provocative suggestions of homoerotic love among the flowery plains, beside the lovely stream, and beneath the fresh garlands. All of these protective measures feel deliberate on the part of Singer Rowe and cushion the suggestions of homoerotic love that follow. The opening lyric lines allow the speaker to slip in and out of a pastoral guise and displace the focus of the poem from innocent to erotic love. As readers we feel suspended between the simple and the complex, the platonic and the erotic, as we try and remind ourselves that this is merely a pastoral and nothing more.

Interestingly, the speaker calls Madam S. *back* to the country in stanza five. This is not Madam S.’s first visit. In fact, the speaker claims it was among the groves that their love was first “introduc’d,” and thus a call to the country implies a return to a once-actualized love. The country not only provides a welcoming space “untoucht” from “that mean influence/ The duller world,” it also nourishes the love, providing a place for their repeated blisses. The enclosures within the space function to reiterate the “pastoral-ness” of the poem, and they work to create a free but protected space for both the poet and the lovers. Thus Rowe’s pastoral space in this poem is a place of both liberation and protection where dissenting positions, attitudes, and (repeated) practices are made possible.

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<sup>97</sup> One can hear a similarity between this poem and Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” as the speaker invites the beloved to “come live with me,” eliding indications of place and reducing

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the distance between lover and beloved.

## Expressions of Female Desire: Liberating Heartbreak

With ease, Singer Rowe transcends the limitations of the pastoral form through frequent shifts in thematic focus. In her poem “By Dispair,” Singer Rowe transforms the genre of pastoral by infusing it with self-dramatization. The poem holds a place in this study for its expression of female desire and its consequences, in particular heartbreak:

When the intruding horrors of the night,  
Had just depriv'd our hemisphere of light;  
And sable foldings seem'd to imitate,  
The blackness and confusion of my fate,  
As by a Rivers side I walkt along,  
Uncurl'd and loose my artless tresses hung.  
Dispair and love were seated in my face,  
And down I sunk, upon the bending grass,  
There to the streams, my mournful griefs relate,  
Cursing the spightful Stars that rul'd my fate;  
To see my tears the gentle floods swell high,  
The Rocks relent, and groan as oft as I,  
The wind less deaf, than my ungreatful Swain,  
Listen and breath o're all my sighs again,  
Ah, never, never, said I with an Air;  
That poor complacent echo, griev'd to hear,  
And softly fearing to increase my pain,  
No, never, never, she reply'd again,  
Then all things else, as trifles I dispise,  
Said I, and smiling clos'd my wretched eyes.

At first glance the poem may not seem like a pastoral poem. Yet it contains many of the features of traditional pastorals such as the personification of nature, the speaker who retires to the grass, the landscape particulars and the presence of the swain. In fact, it possesses many of the qualities Alexander Pope details as requisite in a pastoral in his *Discourse on Pastoral Poetry* (1704). It offers “a design'd scene or prospect” that is presented with variety “obtain'd in a great degree by frequent comparisons, drawn from the most agreeable objects of the country; by interrogations to things inanimate; by beautiful

digressions, but those short...”(121). Singer Rowe isolates a particular moment, and through an intense comparison with and interrogation of nature, the speaker gives voice to her psychological state. There is a digression at the end of the poem when the speaker and nature engage in dialogue while the poem upholds a unity of theme and form, thus adhering to pastoral convention. Singer Rowe meets all of Pope’s conditions.

Yet Singer Rowe goes beyond Pope’s prescriptives to arrive at an exploration of female desire. By presenting the reader with a pastoral landscape that is venturesome and exploratory,<sup>98</sup> the poem breaks from tradition to conquer unknown territory where a distraught female speaker deliberately turns to nature rather than man to express desire and grief. The artificiality of the traditional pastoral form is completely absent, and what we are presented with instead is an insider’s view into the process of self-exploration. Singer Rowe illustrates in this poem how the pastoral can easily accommodate female expression and desire.

Singer Rowe complicates the role of nature in this poem by conventionally gendering nature as female. While this move is not unique to Singer Rowe, nature is significant because it exists in this poem as a replacement for the figure of the swain. It is obvious from the speaker’s characterization of her swain as “ungreatful” that her unsuccessful experience has resulted in an exchange of man for nature. Rather than seeking out comfort in another swain, a common move in the pastoral, the speaker turns to nature, who proves to be more receptive to her complaints and feelings, “The wind less deaf, than

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<sup>98</sup> We can see tendencies in Singer Rowe’s treatment of nature that are reminiscent of Pope’s *Windsor Forest* in which the speaker is taken out of the realm of time and space and transported to a visionary landscape. Singer Rowe’s landscape acts and speaks in tandem with woman. It mimics the psychological state of the speaker, and what results is a kind of eerie world where the impulses of the heart can be voiced and comprehended. Singer Rowe sets up this other world space within the first four lines. The “horrors of the night” deprive the hemisphere of light to create a place of dark sable blackness, which in turn mimics the

my ungrateful Swain” (line 13). Nature is compassionate; she is sensitive, supportive, and loving. The speaker in her loose, hanging artless tresses sinks to the bending grass, a symbol of pastoral humility, and breathes her heavy sighs. The darkness of the night mimics the darkness of her fate; the river flows like the movement of her hanging tresses. Despair and love sit heavy on her face as she sinks to the grasses. Her tears swell like the floods; the rocks relent as oft as she groans; the air breathes and she sighs. Nature and woman exist in perfect harmony.

Such gendering of nature is a complex process as it not only triggers complicated patterns of desire and culturally complex acts that function on many different levels; it also potentially transgresses sexual and social taboos. Coupling nature and woman in this intimate manner results in queer moments that undermine the whole attempt of the pastoral to construct stable binary categories of oppositional difference. These sensual moments cannot be entirely undone by the ultimate return of culturally sanctioned sexual and status arrangements, for Singer Rowe continually contests conventional roles and plays with these moments of intimacy: “And down I sunk, upon the bending grass,/ There to the streams, my mournful griefs relate...” (lines 8-9. Unlike the “ungrateful Swain,” and not wanting to “increase [her] pain,” nature mimics the speaker’s words with gentle sensitivity. They talk in unison, “Ah, never, never, said I with an Air,” “no, never, never, she reply’d again” (lines 15 and 18). Unlike the swain, nature is cautious and its echo fears to echo back. Given the context of the poem, one can conclude from this dialogue that the speaker renounces the love of man for the love of nature/woman, and nature concurs. While nature “listen[s]” and “grieve[s] to hear” the speaker’s pain, her utterance, “No, never, never,”

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“blackness” and “confusion” of the speaker’s state of mind. The pathetic fallacy is in place here, and the speaker goes to great lengths to illustrate this relationship between woman and nature.

provides the assurance the speaker seeks. The quiet but gentle sensitivity that nature willfully offers the speaker through this dialogue, and the language Singer Rowe chooses to relate this bond are both compassionate and sensual.<sup>99</sup> Singer Rowe's heavy use of the comma and her powerful, charged language—her swelling sighs, relentless groans, the echoes and the breath—serve to problematize the dynamics of desire and representation in this poem.

Positioning this particular pastoral poem within a tradition is a difficult task. While George Herbert's "Grief" resembles Singer Rowe's poem thematically, the tone of personal pain and the absence of artificial and stylized depictions of sorrow set this poem apart. The absence of the biblical echoes, quotations, and liturgical images makes Singer Rowe's contribution markedly different from Herbert's. This poem, however, resembles Sir Thomas Wyatt's "I Find no Peace," and even John Donne's "A Valediction of Weeping," with its first-person narration and its articulations of pain and the purposes of life, yet Singer Rowe's intimate relationship with nature and her speaker's utter collapse make this expression of desire all the more powerful, convincing, and provocative. The poem shows an interesting similarity to the works of confessional writers such as Augustine, Boethius, Julian of Norwich, Christine de Pisan, and Margery Kempe. Like these poets, Singer Rowe adopts a confessional form to speak of female desire, love, and loss. Specifically, her

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<sup>99</sup> Isaac Watt's description of Singer Rowe's work in the preface to the 1795 version of *Devout Exercises of the Heart* captures the style of this poem with precision:

[Her verses] are animated with such fire as seems to speak the language of holy passion, and discovers them to be the dictates of her heart...The style, I confess, is raised above that of common meditation or soliloquy; but let it be remembered she was no common Christian. As her virtues were sublime, so she was bright and sparkling, and the vivacity of her imagination had a tincture of the muse almost from her childhood. This made it natural to her to express the inward sentiments of her soul in more exalted language, and to paint her own ideas in metaphor and rapture near akin to the diction of poesy.

technique of bombarding the reader with verse description resembles Pisan's "Dueil Angoisseux":

Anguished grief, immoderate fury  
grievous despair, full of madness,  
endless languor and a life of misfortune,  
full of tears, anguish and torment,  
doleful heart, living in darkness,  
wraithlike body on the point of death,  
are mine continually without cease;  
and thus I can neither be cured nor die...

(lines 1-8)

Notice the similarity between Pisan and Singer Rowe who both talk of despair in terms of the body and couple despair with death, sinking down to the grass for Singer Rowe and reaching "the point of death" for Pisan. The first-person narration and uninterrupted single stanza contribute to the urgency and immediacy of the verse and message. Moreover there is a certain sensuousness to the poem conveyed through the heavy use of the dash as the speaker exhales sorrow with every new breath/verse.

Finally, the poem is a significant inclusion in this study for its suggestion of female liberation. While the pastoral provides Singer Rowe's speaker with the place to articulate sexual desire, heartbreak, and frustration, it is also the place where she discovers choice. The speaker suggests that the center of existence is not in man, or even in God for that matter, but in woman herself, and it is in nature she ultimately finds comfort: "Then all things else, as trifles I dispise,/Said I, and smiling clos'd my wretched eyes" (lines 19-20). It is from this decision, to abandon city life and renounce man, that the speaker alleviates her initial confusion, "the blackness and confusion of my fate" (line 4). The ideological representations of pastoral poetry give way in Singer Rowe to more concrete and detailed



images as she pushes the boundaries of the form to voice the struggles that accompany acts of female liberation and to explore such implicit anxieties and tensions.

## The Sapphic Lament

Moving from pastoral confession to pastoral elegy, in her poem by the same title, “Pastoral Elegy,” Singer Rowe plays with the traditional form of the death lament to explore same-sex relationships and transcendent utopian longing. By inverting traditional gender roles and establishing a complex relationship between the two nymph figures, Singer Rowe breaks from the artificiality of the typical pastoral lament. Unlike traditional pastoral elegies where the dead figure is mourned by another of the opposite sex, Singer Rowe’s first inversion in this poem is an inversion of character roles. Daphne is lamented not by a grieving shepherd, but by another nymph, Philomela. Using two female figures ultimately poses a challenge to the conventional male/female structure of the death lament and results in potentially transgressive moments. While same-sex friendship poetry was not unusual during the Renaissance and early seventeenth century, the implications of the Renaissance rhetoric of friendship and the complexities of defining carnality during the early modern period are varied.<sup>100</sup> Thus a “Pastoral Elegy” may not in fact be an acknowledgment of the possibility for erotic behavior recognized as sexual, but rather it is transgressive as a poetic expression of passion by a woman for another woman. Moreover, while the love between Daphne and Philomela is in fact figured in both the language of friendship and the language of lovers (making it difficult to determine the precise nature of their bond), the intensity of the love is noteworthy in this poem. What results is a complex

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<sup>100</sup> According to Andreadis, how women poets of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even eighteenth centuries gave their feelings for one another verbal form is an expression of their cultural embeddedness in historically variable understandings and definitions of erotic behavior. Andreadis further suggests that these understandings and definitions were not uniform throughout English society, but varied according to social class and geographic location: “Certain behaviors, both physical and verbal, that may seem to us similar to what we are accustomed to defining as ‘lesbian’ may have been a tacitly accepted cultural element in certain

exchange between individual behavior and social exigency as these two nymphs negotiate their relationships with one another. Thus contrary to the fixed categories of the pastoral that define love relations according to binary oppositions, in this lament Singer Rowe exposes the fluidity of desire experienced by individuals.

Daphne and Philomela are complicated figures, as is the relationship that exists between them. As a representation of transgressive female agency, Philomela offers a new form of passionate understanding. From the start of the poem it is clear that Philomela's passion for Daphne runs deep. She is willing to die in Daphne's stead, "So gentle Destinies, decide the strife;/Ah! Spare but hers, and take my hated Life" (lines 1-2) and is completely puzzled by Daphne's willingness to die, "But find'st thou no Reluctancy to part?" (line 8). Philomela is utterly heartbroken by the prospect of losing her friend, "Ah me! ah me! this breaks my feeble heart" (line 7), and it is clear from her sentiments that once Daphne dies she will be entirely undone, incomplete and without purpose, not knowing what to do, or whom to love:

For ah! Depriv'd my dearer Life of thee,  
The World is all a Hermitage to me:  
No more together we shall sit or walk,  
No more of Pan, or of Elysium talk:  
No more, no more shall I the fleeting Day  
In kind Endearments softly pass away:  
No more the Noblest height of Friendship prove,  
Now Daphne's gone, I know not who to Love.

(lines 55-62)

By capturing Philomela moments after the death in lines thirty-five and following and by juxtaposing her against Daphne, Singer Rowe ingeniously uses the form of elegy to breathe realism into this typically one-dimensional pastoral figure. As pastoral dialogue

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segments of society, especially before the introduction of a Latinate sexual terminology...and may not

gives birth to funeral song, we are drawn into the psychology of Philomela. We hear her final exchange with Daphne and her grief-ridden reaction once she dies. We watch her move from friendship to solitude. Singer Rowe executes this move in three parts: the exchange between the two lovers, Daphne's final remarks, and Philomela's immediate reaction. All of these moments are recorded through the use of dialogue, forcing us to draw the rather morbid conclusion that once the dialogue stops, so does life.

Interestingly, however, once Daphne dies, Philomela turns to a discussion of herself,<sup>101</sup> and one cannot help but remember the speaker of Behn's "Song to a Scottish

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necessarily have been recognized as transgressive" (22-23).

<sup>101</sup> A link can be made between Singer Rowe's poem and the work of her contemporary Thomson in his play *Sophonisba* of 1730:

I want to be alone, to find some shade,  
Some solitary gloom; there to shake off  
This weight of Life, this tumult of Mankind;  
And there to listen to the gentle voice...

This sigh of peace and the deistic attitudes expressed by Thomson seems to reflect the attitude of Singer Rowe's speaker, whose melancholy language and expression of the healing peace of rural solitude is made audible through a poetic voice. Yet Singer Rowe's work again harkens back to the work of Christine de Pisan, whose sentiments in her lament "Seulete sui..." (Alone am I) closely mirror those of Singer Rowe's speaker:

Alone am I and alone I wish to be,  
Alone my gentle friend has left me,  
Alone am I, with neither master nor companion,  
Alone am I, in bitterness and in pain,  
Alone am I in tormented lamentation,  
Alone am I much more than any wandering soul,  
Alone am I and without a friend remain.

Alone am I at door or at the window,  
Alone am I when huddled in the corner,  
Alone am I and have shed my fill of tears,  
Alone am I, whether mourning or consoled,  
Alone am I,--and nothing suits me so—  
Alone am I shut up inside my chamber,  
Alone am I and without a friend remain...

Both Pisan and Singer Rowe use the language of loss, mourning their "companion" and the condition of the "wandering soul." They both question the ability to survive the loss as a controlling theme of the lament. Through their language they create similar images: Pisan's entrapment huddled in a corner behind a closed door parallels Singer Rowe's "hermitage." Both speakers cope with death by retreating into closed spaces.

Tune,” whose concerns revolve around the inevitable absence of her sexual pleasure once her lover Jemmy has gone to war.<sup>102</sup> It is difficult to determine who or what is being lamented in this lament. While it would seem reasonable to presume that the dead nymph Daphne is the focus of the lament, an analysis of Philomela’s remarks in the poem’s final stanza indicates otherwise. Philomela repeatedly turns to a discussion of her predicament once Daphne is gone. She is left in the desert world alone; fate has cut her Thread: “I’ll not the loss survive,” there is no wretch “so curst as me” and left “weeping on the shore alone.” Philomela’s life is deprived by the loss of Daphne. The world is now a hermitage where she is left not knowing how to pass the day.

Conversely, Daphne welcomes death without reluctance, “Without the least Reluctance, all below,/Save thee, dear Nymph, I willingly forego” (lines 9-10) and is confident that she has nothing to fear in death, “Not Death’s Grim Looks affright me, tho so near;/Alas! Why should the Brave and Vertuous fear” (lines 33-34). In fact, she looks forward to the prospect of meeting new nymphs and shepherds in heaven: “In those blest shades, to which my soul must flee,/More beauteous Nymphs, and kinder shepherds be” (lines 12-13), in particular reuniting with Strephon and Philomela:

There the wing’d Choir in Loud and Artful strains  
Transmit their Eccho’s to the happy Plains:  
And thither Strephon will my Soul pursue,  
When he, like me, has bid the world adieu.  
There, if her Innocence she still retain,  
My Philomela I shall claspe again... (lines 20-25)

This particular juxtaposition of attitudes, Philomela’s self-loathing and willingness to sacrifice herself, and Daphne’s readiness to die regardless of the heartbreak it will cause

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And while both poems share a similar sense of loss, the poetic focus of the lament is clearly on the self and the self’s predicament.

Philomela, “That from this tiresome stage I may be gone” (line 6), is a curious move by Singer Rowe. Why is it that Philomela is so distraught at the prospect of her friend’s death and Daphne seems indifferent? In fact, Daphne claims that in the afterlife she will not “reflect on what [she] left behind” (line 14). Why does Daphne wish later in the poem to reunite with Philomela, and why is this wish contingent upon Philomela’s chastity, “There, if her Innocence she still retain,/My Philomela I shall claspe again” (lines 24-25)? As readers, we come away from this scene wondering what has taken place between the two prior to our introduction to them, and how we are to define the true nature of their relationship. Singer Rowe’s “shadowed language of erotic ellipses,” a phrase coined by Harriet Andreadis to describe the possibility of transgressive content in women’s writing,<sup>103</sup> appositely elucidates the language used in this poem (in particular lines 25, 59-62) to describe the intensity and ambivalence of feeling between Philomela and Daphne. Regardless of the conclusions we may draw about their relationship, the juxtaposition of Daphne and Philomela serves a dual function—to intensify Philomela’s commitment to and feelings of love for Daphne and to create a certain ambivalence of feelings between these two nymphs, blurring the boundaries of their friendship.<sup>104</sup> Such an exposition in dialogue of the different claims of love and friendship belongs to the pastoral tradition if we recall, with Patrick Cullen, how “the pastoral mode itself from Theocritus onward involved, implicitly or explicitly a critical exploration and counterbalancing of attitudes, perspectives, and experiences” (1). Singer Rowe’s pastoral dialogue between Philomela

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<sup>103</sup> See Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics 1550-1714* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001):23.

<sup>104</sup> This blurring of boundaries between friends and lovers heard elsewhere in Singer Rowe, is reminiscent of Aphra Behn’s “To the Fair Clarinda,” and Katherine Philips’s “To My Excellent Lucasia on our Friendship.”

and Daphne does just this. She exploits the opportunity for meaningful dialectic in this poem by exposing the tensions and anxieties implicit in articulating same-sex desire.

Finally, an interesting, although somewhat divergent point here is Singer Rowe's use of the pastoral space. Whereas pastoral frequently depicts a delightful elysian-like setting, this poem refers to the earthly regions as "poor Earth," "this tiresome stage," and "this desert World," while the heavenly regions are depicted as the only true Elysium:

In those blest shades, to which my soul must flee,  
More beauteous Nymphs, and kinder Shepherds be;  
Who ne're reflect on what they left behind,  
Rapt with the Joys they in Elysium find.  
By Silver streams, through blissful shades they rove,  
Their Pleasures to Eternity improve.  
There all the Smiling Year is cloth'd with Green;  
Not Autumn, but Eternal Spring is seen...

(lines 12-19)

Singer Rowe shifts the focus of a pastoral paradise from an earthly region to a heavenly realm, and within this space Daphne hopes for a reunion of souls with Philomela. Paradise is connected with immortality: "Teach me the language of paradise, the strains of immortality" (*Devout Exercises*, 54). Thus paradise is found in the afterlife, and the afterlife is figured as pastoral.

## **Blurred Moments of Erotic Spirituality: When Religious Fervency Meets Pastoral Simplicity**

Moving from city to country and country to consecrated, Singer Rowe further uses the pastoral to give voice to female desire by combining both secular and spiritual elements through a complex and intricate weaving of celestial, personal, and earthly worlds.

Following in the tradition of Isaac Watts, Singer Rowe is perhaps best known for her divine poems, particularly her biblical paraphrases, and divine hymns. Yet when she couples religious fervency and eroticism with pastoral simplicity, she creates complex poetic moments that set her apart from her contemporaries. As readers, we move in and out of both an artificial and contemplative realm once the pastoral meets the devotional.<sup>105</sup> In particular Singer Rowe's frequent references to divine inspiration and the inner life of the soul speak of a union between the transcendental and human condition, and with the use of the pastoral she considers the differences between immortality and the material body.

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<sup>105</sup> It is not uncommon in Singer Rowe's pastorals to be witness to such a blurring of poetic traditions where nostalgic moments of liberated and innocent love, exclamations in celebration of fields and groves, and religious conversions are all envisioned within a prelapsarian moment such as in "To Chole. An Epistle":

All hail, ye fields and ev'ry happy grove!  
How your soft scenes the tender flame improve,  
And melt the thoughts, and turn the soul to love!... Thus live the Dryads, thus the sacred race  
That haunt the valleys, and the fountains grace;  
The rural scenes indulge their warm desires,  
Heighten their joys, and feed immortal fires.  
Diana, who in heav'n could guard her breast,  
In Latmos' flow'ry fields the god confest.  
No name, but his, among the swains is known,  
Superior Love is all the pow'r they own;  
Their willing tribute to his shrine they bring,  
Turtles, and lambs, and all the blooming spring,  
While to their tuneful harps his praise they sing...  
The nodding groves, and falling floods reply,  
And all confess the powerful deity.

Here, Singer Rowe's pastoral space is a place where one can exercise the soul and where the soul can turn to love through a return to a past paradise.



In “A Hymn. In Imitation of Cant. V.vi.vii.,” Singer Rowe blurs generic boundaries by strategically adopting key moments from Song of Songs, and manipulates these moments to prioritize female desire. The Song of Songs, commonly referred to as the Song of Solomon (attributed to Solomon in the Hebrew title), is a collection of love poems in the form of songs addressed by a man to a woman, and vice versa. In Singer Rowe’s imitation, the divine love is figured in pastoral terms as an earthly love. Singer Rowe varies the relationship of husband and wife to female speaker and Christ, which completely changes the dynamic of the original hymn, resulting in complicated moments of desire. Furthermore, she moves the poem from Jerusalem to the vales and plains of a typical pastoral setting that serves to blur the boundaries between country and consecrated. Thus the Biblical verse of Canticle five,

I opened the door for my lover,  
but he had already gone.  
How I wanted to hear his voice!  
I looked for him, but couldn’t find him;  
I called to him, but heard no answer...

becomes for Singer Rowe:

I’ve search’d the pleasant vales and plains,  
And clim’d the hills around;  
But no glad tidings of my love,  
Among the swains have found.

I’ve oft invok’d him in the shades,  
By ev’ry stream and rock;  
The rocks, the streams, and echoing shades,  
My vain industry mock.

I trac’d the city’s noisy streets  
And told my cares aloud;  
But no intelligence could meet  
Among the thoughtless crowd.

I search’d the temple round, for there

He oft' has blest my sight,  
And half unveil'd, of his lov'd face  
Disclos'd the heav'nly light.

But with these glorious views, no more  
I feast my ravish'd eyes.  
For veiled with interposing clouds,  
My eager search he flies.

O, Could I in some desert land  
His sacred foot-steps trace,  
I'd with a glad devotion kneel,  
And bless the happy place.

I'd follow him o'er burning sands,  
Or where perpetual snow  
With horrid aspect clothes the ground,  
To find my Lord I'd go.

(lines 9-36)

While these verses are provocative, the biblical commentary and preaching here permit a certain masking of the poet behind the authority of the text. Both the eroticisation of a Christ figure and the employment of biblical scripture for authorial masking are common to the female mystics and many seventeenth-century religious lyricists who desired to bridge the gap between divinity and mortality, between heavenly and earthly.<sup>106</sup> Yet this blurring of devotional and pastoral, divine and earthly is somewhat unsettling, for the speaker's pursuit of the Lord too closely resembles the frivolous and sexualized love pursuits of nymphs and swains. Like the swain who charges nature for help in conquering his maid, Singer Rowe's female speaker too turns to nature for help, invoking every stream and rock in her search for her lover, the Lord. Yet nature does not support her in her effort; in fact,

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<sup>106</sup> See Sharon Achinstein, "Romance of the Spirit: Female Sexuality and Religious Desire in Early Modern England," *ELH*. 69 no.2 (2002): 413-438; Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*. (London: Routledge, 1996); Phyllis Mack in her *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*(Berkeley: U of California P, 1992); and Richard Rambuss, "Pleasure and Devotion: The Body of Jesus and Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric" in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg(Durham: Duke UP, 1994): 253-79.

the rocks, streams and shades “mock” her “vain industry” (lines 15-16). Interestingly, the speaker’s first impulse is to search for her Lord “among the swains” and “pleasant vales and plains” before turning in stanza six to the temple, where “he of’t has blest [her] sight.” Again, this move serves to dismantle the boundaries between pastoral and sacred, consequently conflating both spiritual and erotic desire.

While Singer Rowe imitates the speaker’s impatience so clearly heard in the *Canticles*, this urgency and sense of desperation coupled with bodily desire mimic the hopeless swain of pastoral poetry, whose attempts at love are often unfulfilled. The speaker unleashes her thoughts “and told my cares aloud” (line 18), making her desire/love pursuit known in every stanza. And while Singer Rowe does in fact adopt the language of divine poetry “the heav’nly light,” “with a glad devotion kneel,” and these glorious views” ultimately the language here is rooted in the body, “thro’ ranks of interposing deaths/To his embrace I’d fly,/And to enjoy his blissful smiles,/Would be content to die” (lines 41-44). In this physical rather than soulful search, the speaker “climbs” and “invokes” in vain, unable to satiate her “ravish’d eyes.” Thus Singer Rowe investigates the tension between the spiritual and material, and by breaking down this binary opposition, she gives voice to female erotic/spiritual desire.

## **Conclusion**

A close reading of the pastoral poems of Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe reveals that their poems consistently use the conventions of the pastoral to speak of a space in which love that is not socially approved may flourish, where women are free to speak as sexualized subjects and to express their thoughts, feelings, and desires without blame, and where meditative reflection and individual exploration are welcomed. When studying Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe together, exclusively as pastoral poets, several parallels emerge. Each shares a fascination with the pastoral form as it appears and reappears throughout the entirety of their literary careers. Each creates a unique pastoral space, one that is often animated and sensitive to the needs of those who inhabit it. Their pastoral landscapes are frequently active and participate in the action of the nymphs and swains, albeit fostering and validating love, showing companionship, or extending the thoughts that occupy the speaker's mind. These women create a realistic, natural environment, one that is divorced from artificiality and conducive to new themes and narratives that ultimately lend insight into the creative mind and life of the Restoration female poet.

Their pastorals are intimate, and they share a female sensibility in style and approach that is different from their classical and contemporary male predecessors. Moreover, their pastorals provide an opening to a female voice, one that allows women to speak as spiritual, independent, erotic subjects, and a space for the female poet where she can invent, create, and experiment. Their pastorals act as a salient mode of expression that

allows these poets the license to explore alternative roles for women, various poetic voices, spiritual pursuits and possibilities, and to render possible same-sex desire and practice.

Specifically, a close reading of Behn's pastoral poems suggests that whenever Behn employs a pastoral convention, she deliberately seems to focus it on creating new possibilities for gender relationships. Behn's poems consistently use the conventions of the pastoral "to free her explorations into the psychology of desire from entanglement with the social constraints that make the consequences of desire oppressive for women."<sup>107</sup> Her pastorals create a space in which love that is not socially approved may flourish, where women are free to speak as sexualized subjects and to express their thoughts, feelings, and desires without guilt. Her pastorals animate a female voice and carve a domain for the female poet from which she can invent and create in feminine terms an ideal of sexual freedom.

Through strategies of redefining and remapping female sexual experience, Behn's pastorals reconstruct female subjectivity while simultaneously upholding and frequently disregarding the standards of virtue and decorum requisite of "the Fair Sex." The pastoral genre allows her a position from which she as a woman writer can challenge inherited literary and social codes. Working within the system does not jeopardize female virtue and acceptable modes of behavior, nor does it threaten the pastoral as a heterosexist tradition. By adhering to the larger paradigm of the pastoral tradition, and within an adaptable Arcadia, Behn's pastorals exist as a perfect exploratory, artistic site. Behn as pastoral poet is free to express, in feminine terms, radical values of liberty, equality, and sorority without shame or fear of transgressing convention.

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<sup>107</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect" *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 7 nos.1-2 (1980): 74.

As a woman, a wife, a political outsider, and a poet, Anne Finch uses these positions to revise the power relations of representation and oppositional difference. Her attention to the place of gender in Augustan representation is seen most clearly in her pastoral poetry, in which she redefines the boundaries between the poet and the object, reverses the roles of the pastoral nymph and swain, and expresses female desire, autonomy, independence, and mutual, marital love. Figured in all stages of her literary career, from her early works generated during her time at court to her poems later in life, the pastoral appears and reappears as Finch plays, inverts, and re-invents its conventions. Specifically her ability to redirect the masculine tradition of the *carpe diem* theme to suit her feminine purposes illustrates both her skill and innovation as a pastoral poet. Her exploitation of generic traditions such as retirement, nature poetry, and the pastoral; her masking strategies, dramatic techniques, and practice of indirection, all allow her the freedom to express thoughts and ideas that are often at variance with the literary and social milieu of early eighteenth-century England. Always cognizant of the rules of decorum, Finch, unlike Behn, strategically carves out a space for herself within a shady retreat from which to author herself and her world uninhibitedly. This complex retreat space, as evidenced at every step of her literary production, allows Finch the license to authorize both private sentiments and public complaints. Intermingling narrative and dramatic elements, Finch illustrates with ease that the pastoral is adaptable to a wide range of themes, ranging from love to war, and she shows how the form allows her artistic liberation.

Elizabeth Singer Rowe's pastorals illustrate an amalgamation of several competing components, both sacred and secular, that speak of a place where rural and ethereal are interchangeable and coexistent. As rustic and simple fuses with the celestial and spiritual

in what seems to be an effortless maneuver, the reader can almost see in embryonic form the direction she is moving as these pastoral contributions become the precursor to her later articulation of immortality of the soul in works such as *Friendship in Death* (1728) and *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1728).<sup>108</sup> Here Singer Rowe visualizes the afterlife in pastoral terms, makes her heaven a celestial realm, a golden age of tranquility, retirement, and bliss free from society and all of its trappings.

It is hard to escape the pastoral in a study of Singer Rowe's complete body of works. At every turn, pastoral images, figures, and landscape appear throughout her literary production. Although scholars are quick to point out that she was embarrassed by

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<sup>108</sup> Several letters speak of heaven as a retirement and a realm of faith and beatitude such as Letter IX, whereby an ex-statesman writes to an anonymous Lord about his retreat from the earthly world and his newly discovered paradise in heaven, his "absolute retreat":

Your commands are very obliging, in giving me the Opportunity to be impertinent, by entering into a detail of my solitary amusements, in this absolute retreat, from all the polite and agreeable part of Society...my mind retires within itself... I have, indeed, heard from the men, who teach such holy fables, that the soul was immortal, and capable of celestial joys: But I rather wish'd, than believe'd, these transporting truths, and put them on a level with the poet's rosy bowers, their myrtle shades, and soft Elysian fields; but now I am convinc'd of their evidence, and triumph in the privileges of my own being.(I,58-9).

A similar exploration of rural simplicity in heaven is seen in Parts II and III of *Letters Moral and Entertaining* in which Rosalind finds freedom in renouncing her courtly manners and pretensions for a life of pastoral simplicity:

I have entirely put off the fine lady, and all my court airs; I have almost forgot I am an Earl's daughter, and should start at the sound of lady Frances; instead of that, I am plain Rosalinda, without any other appellation, but what the gentle swains now and then give me, of a handsome lass, or a proper damsel; with which I am infinitely better pleased...II, 5-6).

This recurrent theme appears again later in Singer Rowe's career in *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737) wherein earthly existence is deemed corrupt and the speaker longs for a heavenly idyllic afterlife:

My thirsty soul pines for the waters of life. Oh! Who will refresh me with the pleasurable draught? How long shall I wander in this desert land, where every prospect is waste and barren; I look round me in vain, and sigh still unsatisfied: Oh! Who will lead me to the still waters, and make me repose in green pastures where the wary are forever at rest? (33-35).

her early pastorals and was anxious to divorce herself from her association with the *Athenian Mercury* as the Pindarical Lady, evidence reveals that the pastoral was a controlling principle throughout her work, in her correspondence, her religious meditations, her amatory meditations, occasional verse and prose. Her contributions to the *Athenian Mercury* in 1693, her retreat to the countryside of Frome in her later years, and her continued pastoral role-playing and sentimental relationship with Lady Hertford are all testaments to her pastoral preoccupations throughout her life and literary career.

A close reading of Singer Rowe's pastoral poems illustrates her ability to use the complexity and structure of the genre as an entry point to her meditative and thoughtful articulations on life, love, and her Lord. Her ability to redirect the pastoral tradition through a complex and intricate blending of elegiac and confessional verse allows the reader to understand her relation to the male poetic tradition through her changes from her source. While Singer Rowe has been repeatedly aligned with a masculine tradition of hymnody, with its founder Isaac Watts at the helm, Singer Rowe is more appropriately placed among the mystical poets whose uniqueness of style, blurring of generic boundaries, and highly personal and eroticized relationship with the Lord are in keeping with her poetic approach. Yet ultimately, she resists categorization. She employs the pastoral in order to manipulate and challenge it, and in so doing, she ultimately challenges notions of religion, gender, and genre. Her unique blending of secular and sacred worlds, her ever-changing pastoral landscape, and her thematic variety and approach provide a vehicle for poetic experimentation. While upholding the standards of virtue and decorum, Singer Rowe successfully uses her position as pastoral poet and woman writer to challenge the literary and social codes that she inherited. It is thus time to divorce Singer Rowe's reputation



from her work in order to recognize the full range of her poetic potential and to acknowledge her as first and foremost a daring pastoralist.

The pastorals of Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe are credible contributions to the genre, recognizable for their artistic control, invention, and achievement. Their poems serve to expand the genre, to define it, and to demonstrate its full potential. Thus in according this body of work the attention it deserves, we can see not only the many contributions of these women to pastoral, but also the creative ways in which they challenged the genre.

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